Fiction, English.

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A MILLIONAIRE'S LOVE STORY

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BY

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CHAPTER I.

A CERTAIN paradoxical wit once remarked that George Kilvert was a man very much to be pitied, for the reason that he was too wealthy ever to experience the peculiar delight of wasting a sovereign. Doubtless there are people in the world who would assure you that it would be impossible to be overburdened with riches; this argument, however, will serve to show you how little they realize the thraldom that encircles a millionaire. Kilvert was wont pathetically to declare that his father, otherwise an entirely unromantic man, had chanced to acquire a liking for the romance of money-making, and for this reason had been unable to leave off when he had accumulated his fair proportion of the world's wealth. What pleasure this amassing of money gave him no one was able to tell, for a more unostentatious individual than he could scarcely have been discovered on the face of the habitable globe. He wore the shabbiest of clothes; when he traveled

he invariably patronized the third class, for the reason that there was no fourth; he lived the simplest of lives by preference, drank nothing stronger than coffee, and preferred Yorkshire pudding to the finest confection, that was ever placed upon a table. To the day of his death he never once entered the doors of a theater, not because he did not approve of the drama, but because he failed to see the advantage of spending his money on an amusement which was only an amusement, and which, so he was given to understand, offered nothing in return but mere words and a transient emotion. And yet he was far from being a mean man. He gave liberally to such people and things as he deemed worthy, never failed to help a friend in his hour of trouble, or permitted an obligation to pass unrewarded. He looked upon life as life looked upon him, and, paradoxical though it may seem, gradually built up for himself a name for niggardliness and generosity, for thrift, and, as you shall presently see, for the most reckless gambling, for bigotry, and also for the most supreme disregard of the conventionalities of life. It only remains for me to cite one of the greatest cases in point. And since it vitally concerns his character, and the story I have to tell, it may not be found altogether lacking in interest.

On one memorable occasion Mr. Kilvert's

health was somewhat run down, and he was ordered to the seaside for a fortnight. After much deliberation he saw the force of the medico's argument, and departed to the village of Beachcombe-on-Sea, a tiny hamlet on the Sussex coast. Let it not be supposed, however, that he comported himself there like other men on a holiday. That was not his way. His first afternoon was spent in trying to convince himself that complete rest and absence from business could not fail to be delightful. On the second day he began to feel restless and to prowl about the village, noting, with an eye ever on the lookout for such matters, the various opportunities it presented for speculation. As every one must admit who knew it in those almost forgotten pre-bicycle, pre-motor car days, it was a charming little place, a world unto itself, and unknown save to the more adventurous tourist. The nearest railway station at that time was five miles distant, while the only sort of conveyance that formed a connecting link with the outside world was the fly from the inn and the antiquated, four-miles-an-hour carrier's cart. There was no pier, there were no bathing-machines, and, so far as shipping was concerned, only a few humble fishing-boats. The one inn of the place was scarcely larger than a beershop, the majority of the dwellings were small cottages inhabited by the

fisher-folk ; yet the air was excellent, bracing and pure beyond compare ; the sands were exactly fitted to the requirements of children ; and there was abundant facility, matters having once been arranged, for an excellent cross-Channel service to France.

On the third day after his arrival Mr. Kilvert stood on the shore with his back to the sea, and took stock of the prospects of the place. Some calculations on the sand made with the ferrule of his walking-stick followed ; after which he produced pencil and paper and made a few careful notes. Half an hour later he had discovered the name and address of the largest landed proprietor in the district, and had returned to his lodgings to commence operations. A fortnight afterwards it was known to such of the rustics as took any interest in Public Affairs, that the greater portion of the village had changed hands. Within a month an army of Architects and Surveyors had put in an appearance, and had quartered themselves and their men upon the inhabitants, much to the benefit of trade. Within six months of Kilvert's cogitations on the sands, half a hundred new streets had been planned, and villa residences were already in course of erection. Rumors were rife concerning a gigantic hotel, a pier, and an esplanade ; while one spirit, bolder than the rest, declared that mention had been made of a gasworks and a railway station.

From a fortnight Mr. Kilvert's holiday, for so he persisted in calling it, spread into a month, then into another. After that he made journeys to the place regularly once a fortnight. Never in his life had he enjoyed himself so much. While at Beachcombe he scarcely allowed himself breathing-space, from the time he rose in the morning until he went to bed again at night. Most of his meals were eaten standing up at a side-board, the table being unapproachable by reason of the mountain of papers and plans it supported. Then the metamorphosis commenced. The first sod of the railway was turned on young George's fifth birthday, and the foundation-stone of the pier was laid on his father's forty-fifth. Any one who had seen the place before would scarcely have recognized it after five years, and would not have known it at all after ten. An enormous hotel, with half a dozen smaller ones, all built upon the latest plans, looked out, across a wide esplanade, upon the sea. The bay was surrounded by a crescent of attractive villas. A uniformed band played twice daily upon the noble pier, upon which was to be seen, moreover, a glass concert pavilion. Children in hundreds thronged the beach, the streets contained many fine shops, and, more wonderful than anything in the eyes of the old inhabitants, there was a spic-and-span railway sta-

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As he spoke the guard outside waved his flag, and the train steamed slowly out of the station. Placing the papers on the seat for his companion to select from, George produced his cigar-case and extracted a weed. Mildmay did not smoke, but he had no objection to other people doing so. That was exactly Edward Mildmay's *metier* in life. The easiest-going of men, he never objected to what any one else did or said. In a way he was afraid of women, but he was never known to advise his friends against matrimony. He was not a lover of music, yet in order to be obliging he would sit out the most classical concert of the season, without marring his friends' pleasure by allowing it to be seen that he was bored. He disliked horse-racing, no one could ever tell why, yet he invariably drove down to Epsom on the rowdiest drag of the year. He found no enjoyment in dancing, but he was always ready to make up a set, and to allow himself to be pushed through a figure to which the Maze at Hampton Court is so much child's play. Perhaps this was why he was such a universal favorite.

"I suppose I get on with people," he had once remarked, "because of my grandmotherliness. Matchmaking mammas know that I am hopeless, and so they play me as a foil against richer men. The young ladies them-

selves, bless their dear little hearts, regard me in the light of a tame poodle, and are kind to me. Being a nonentity has its advantages, believe me!"

As the train made its way over the bridge, Kilvert smoked his cigar meditatively. He could think of nothing save the lovely girl he had seen at Victoria. He had met many beautiful women in his time, but never one whose face had appealed to his fancy in such a manner as this one had done.

"By Jove, little man," he said at last to his companion, "as I was getting those papers at the stall just now, there stood alongside me the most beautiful woman I have ever seen."

"That accounts for the number of papers you purchased," Mildmay returned. "Have you any idea who the lady was?"

"Not the remotest notion," George replied. "She's in the train now."

"Going to Beachcombe very probably," said the other. "Any one with her?"

"Yes, an elderly, foreign-looking individual, the sort of man I shouldn't trust further than I could see him."

"You are a true Englishman, my dear George. The man is probably her father, an entirely respectable professional man who has not been out of England in his life."

"I'd lay a heavy wager he's no Englishman,"

said George, emphatically. "And I'd stake my life he's no blood relation to the girl."

"Perhaps he's her husband. Beautiful girls *do* occasionally marry plain men."

"It's possible, but not probable. What could a girl like that see in such a man?"

"I am afraid I am getting out of my depth," said Mildmay. "If he is not her father, no blood relation, nor her husband, it's difficult to see what else he can be to her. By the way, have you heard that Reggie Milgrave is engaged after all?"

George had not heard it, but at the moment he did not feel very much inclined to take any deep interest in the Honorable Reginald's love affairs. He expressed his surprise at the news, however, as a matter of course.

"Poor Reggie!" Mildmay went on, pursuing the subject in his own quiet way; "he has managed to escape so long, that it seems almost a pity he should fall a victim at last. I wrote him a letter of condolence this morning-I shall be compelled to buy him a wedding present later on, I suppose. Really a law should be passed absolving bachelors with limited incomes from such taxation."

"Who is the lady he is going to marry?" asked George, still without the slightest interest.

"Old General Pegeau's second girl," said

Mildmay. "A charming creature in every way, so the friends, who do not know her, say."

"Ten years older than Reggie, if she's a day," put in George. "Sits her horse like a feather bolster, and can discriminate among the various brands of champagne as cleverly as any wine merchant."

"My dear George," expostulated his companion, "really you should be less severe. I am told she is a very good-natured girl."

"She *must* be, to take Reggie Milgrave," George retorted, with the memory of a certain fair face still haunting him. "He's well known to be the biggest fool in London."

After that conversation regarding Lord Brankwaite's youngest son was plainly impossible. At intervals throughout the journey, however, Mildmay endeavored to draw his companion into conversation, but for once in his life George Kilvert felt a decided longing for solitude. On each occasion that the train stopped he went to the window and looked out, fearful lest the couple in whom he had taken such an interest should alight and he not be aware of the fact. He saw no sign of them, however, until the train ran into Beachcombe Station, and he and Mildmay stood upon the platform. Then he caught a glimpse of the tall willowy figure at the further end of the

station standing beside a most unromantic stack of luggage. More than once have I heard Kilvert declare that his man, Edwards, is the best servant in and out of London. On this occasion, however, he felt inclined to find fault with his quickness, for the man had collected their baggage, hailed a cab, and was ready to leave the station in less time almost than it takes to tell. As they drove along the handsome street that leads from the railway station to the sea front, on which is situated Beachcombe's grandest hotel, the Imperial, George thought of his father, and of the delight the old gentleman had felt in building and exploiting the place.

"When you're down here you must feel that you are monarch of all you survey," said Mildmay, clasping his daintily gloved hands on the top of the apron of the cab. "It would be a pleasant experience for me, just once in a way, to enter a town and be able to say to myself, 'This is mine—every house—every shop—every hotel!'"

"You'd very soon find the novelty wear off," George retorted, with a gloominess that was by no means usual with him. "As soon as my presence in the town becomes known, as many of my charming tenants as have grievances to be redressed, will demand an interview with me, oblivious to the fact that I am down here for a

holiday, and that I don't take the least interest in their concerns. Somebody—I think it was the mayor—had the impudence, only a short time back, to infer that it was my duty to represent the place in Parliament. Good Heavens ! Fancy me in Parliament !"

Before Mildmay had time to bring his imagination to the necessary pitch, they had stopped before the portals of the Imperial Hotel. It was certainly a fine building, and, like every other imperial edifice in the town, owed its origin and position to the keen foresight of the man who had been known to the inhabitants as the Father of Beachcombe. From its balconies a splendid view of the bay and of the pier, with its glittering pavilion, could be obtained. In some respects it was more Continental than English, and this perhaps may have been one of the reasons of its success. The vestibule was large and handsome, and contained many charming seats, carefully secreted in corners and under spreading palms. From the hall a magnificent marble staircase ascended and gave it a palatial air. On spying Kilvert and Mildmay from his office on the right, the manager hastened to greet them. He was obsequiousness itself. He had received George's telegram, and had allotted them the best rooms then vacant. If they had not lunched in town a meal should be served without delay. No trouble, he assured

them, would be too great for Mr. Kilvert and his friend. No pains should be spared to make them enjoy their stay.

"I bask, my dear George, in the reflection of your glory," said little Mildmay, as they ascended the stairs together.

"Reflected fiddlesticks!" George returned "What's the time?"

"A quarter to six," Mildmay replied.

"Then we've just time to see our rooms and to take a little walk before dinner. I feel that the air is doing me good already."

They strolled out on the Esplande, watched the merry children playing upon the sands, derived some amusement from a party of negro minstrels, and at a quarter to seven returned to the hotel to dress for dinner. When that important meal was at an end, and they had taken their coffee in the hall, George inquired of Mildmay how they should amuse themselves during the evening.

"There is the club," he said, "where you may be able to get some whist and mild pool; there is the theatre, where I see they are performing a last year's farce; and there is the pier with its promenaders, and the Pavilion with musical sketches, and possibly, though I hope not, a conjurer. Take your choice."

"Heaven forbid that I should visit the seaside to spend my evenings in a club," Mildmay

replied. "I have been surfeited this week with theatres. To-night I feel at peace with all the world, so let us choose the pier and watch the promenaders from a quiet corner. I feel that a conjurer would kill me."

They accordingly donned light coats and left the hotel.

By this time the character of the evening had completely changed. The day had been fine, now heavy clouds covered the sky. They walked to the end of the pier, passed the brilliantly lighted Pavilion, and then seated themselves beside the ship's bell—a relic of a merchant vessel that had been wrecked in the bay some thirty years before. Still, try how he would, George was unable to rid himself of the remembrance of the face of the girl who had come down to Beachcombe by the same train as himself that afternoon. It had certainly produced an extraordinary effect upon him.

"I wonder who she can be?" he said to himself for the thousandth time, as they watched the endless stream of promenaders. "That she is a lady, I'll swear, but—heigho! this sort of thing won't do. If I think much more about her, I shall begin to imagine myself in love. And yet I can't help thinking that I should like to know more of her."

At that moment a few drops of rain pattered down upon them.

"I thought it wouldn't be long coming," said Mildmay. "Now, if we are wise, we shall seek shelter."

"I'm afraid we're booked for the Pavilion after all," George replied.

As the shower was quickly developing into a downpour, they made their way with all speed towards the door of the glass-roofed building in the center of the pier. George paid for admission and they passed into the hall. At the moment of their entering a young lady, clad in a boy's costume combining half a dozen colors, and wearing a large palm-leaf hat upon her head, was explaining to the audience from the stage that the greatest happiness she had known in her life was when she was "a little colored coon, and played her banjo in the light of the moon." So impressed was the audience by her reminiscences that they demanded a repetition. When she made her final bow and had gone off, a stout, florid gentleman proclaimed in a voice that might have descended to him from the bulls of Bashan that he feared no foe, particularly when clad in a certain shining armor. When he had also bowed himself off, George glanced at the program he held in his hand.

"'Madame Cecilia Cardew and Herr Paulus Gravbowski: Ballade and Polonaise by Vieuxtemps,'" he read aloud. "We are certainly Cosmopolitans in our tastes this evening."

There was a sudden hush of expectancy in the hall, then the curtain at the back of the stage was drawn on one side, and the beautiful woman, whom he had seen at Victoria and also on Beachcombe platform that afternoon, stood before them.

CHAPTER II.

KILVERT could scarcely believe his eyes when he saw, advancing towards the footlights of the Pavilion platform, the very girl in whom he had that day taken such an absorbing interest. From the moment that she made her appearance he was a different man. He forgot where he was, forgot that Mildmay was beside him, forgot everything, in fact, save the presence of that beautiful figure upon the stage. In her hand she carried a violin, while the man whom George had seen lying back in the corner of the carriage, followed her, and took his place at the piano. It was fortunate for George Kilvert that he was not a very highly cultivated musician. Had he been so, I fear the performance which followed would scarcely have offorded him the pleasure it seemed now to do. That Madame Cardew possessed talent of a kind there could be no doubt, but it was certainly not of a sufficiently high order ever to bring her any great fame. It was not of her playing, however, that the enthusiastic young man, seated on the right-hand side of the Pavilion, was thinking. Indeed, I am doubtful whether

he even listened to it. The enjoyment he was deriving was from the contemplation of the pale, beautiful face of the performer, set off by the dark wood of the instrument she held beneath her chin. If it had seemed lovely to him at the railway station, it was a hundred times more so now. Her tall figure showed to great advantage in the tight-fitting satin dress she wore ; while the dark color of the material contrasted admirably with the pure whiteness of her skin. Her accompanist played as if he were enchanted. His long white hair fell upon his shoulders in a theatrical fashion, and added to the grotesqueness of his general appearance. At last the selection came to an end, and the fair artist bowed her acknowledgments of the somewhat faint-hearted applause that rewarded her performance.

"These idiots are not worth playing to," muttered Kilvert, in a storm of indignation.

"They nearly clapped their hands off at the conclusion of that wretched coon song, but when they have something really fine given them, they cannot appreciate it. I've no patience with such people."

"I take it, then, that *was* a really fine performance?" said Mildmay, as if he were anxious not to commit himself. "It did not appear to me to be anything out of the common ; but there, one can never get at the value of these sort of things."

"It was splendid," said George, enthusiastically. "I wouldn't wish to hear anything better."

He once more consulted his program. "Madame Cecilia Cardew," he muttered to himself. "The name fits her like a glove. The Goddess of music." Then once more he asked himself the question he had put so many times before, "What can the relationship be between her and that man?"

The next performer claimed to be a thought-reader, but I fear that Kilvert paid very little attention to the wonderful things he did. He had discovered that they were to have nothing more from Madame Cardew that evening, but a notice stated that she would perform on the following afternoon, and again in the evening. He registered a vow that he would be present, whatever Mildmay might think or say.

When the performance was at an end, they left the Pavilion and returned to their hotel. The rain had ceased, and the moon was rising into a well-nigh cloudless sky. As soon as Mildmay declared himself tired, his host proposed that they should go bed. This they did, bidding each other good night in the corridor outside their respective rooms.

"Just give me a smoking-coat, and then you can leave me," said George to his servant. "I shan't go to bed yet."

When his man had departed, he went to the window and opened it. The moon threw her mellow light upon the heaving waters, and the ripple of the wavelets on the shore came up to him like music. Little by little his thoughts drifted back to the brilliantly lighted Pavilion, and once more he saw that tall, graceful figure standing before the footlights, her violin beneath her chin, and her proud, sweet face looking down upon the audience of which he was proud to have been one.

"I should not have thought it possible that a woman's face could have made such an impression upon me," he said to himself. "I saw it for the first time this afternoon, and now I can think of nothing else. Any one would think I was a boy again, indulging in his first calf love."

He tried to laugh at himself, but the attempt was far from being a success. At last he rose from his chair and prepared for bed.

"I must endeavor to find out something more about her," he said, as he laid his head upon the pillow. "I don't like the look of that fellow, her accompanist. He is as theatrical as a man can be, but she—— I never saw anything so beautiful in my life."

As he fell asleep thinking of her, it is scarcely to be wondered at that she haunted his dreams. He dreamt that he was standing in a great concert hall which was crowded with people.

Madame Cardew was upon the stage, violin in hand; her companion, as usual, was seated at the piano. She began to play very softly. Then the character of the music changed, and it was not long before it seemed to Kilvert that there was a message in it for him. It was as if she were calling to him to save her from the other man. "Help me, help me," the message ran; "come to me, and save me before it is too late." Rising from his place in the audience, he rushed towards the stage, but before he could reach it, Gravbowski had left the piano, and had seized the girl. Drawing a knife from beneath his coat, he was about to stab her with it, when George awoke, trembling from head to foot. Switching on the electric light, he sat up in bed.

"That was something more than a dream," he said to himself. "Good Heavens! I thought the brute had got her."

It was just daybreak, and, feeling that it would be impossible to obtain any more sleep, he took up the novel he had purchased at Victoria that afternoon, and endeavored to interest himself in it. He was not successful, however. The piteous face he had seen in his dream appealed to him from every page. When, later, he appeared at the breakfast-table, he looked as if he had not had a wink of sleep all night.

"You're not looking yourself this morning, old fellow," said Mildmay, as they sat down to their meal.

"I did not have a very good night," Kilvert returned. "The old story of the strange bed, I suppose. However, I shall doubtless make up for it to-night, so it doesn't matter very much."

They spent the morning on the Esplande, Mildmay deep in the morning papers, George pretending to read, but in reality watching the people about him. For some reason or another he felt out of sorts with himself and the world in general. Mildmay's humorous criticisms of the politics of the moment irritated him beyond measure, while even the happy laughter of the group of children, making sandhills on the shore below them, offended him. Once more he argued with himself as to the absurdity of it all. Yet, ridicule himself as he might, he had a feeling that Fate was drawing him on to a certain goal.

"Look, my dear fellow," said Mildmay at last, as he folded up his paper and laid it on the seat beside him, "if I am not mistaken, the lady coming towards us is your fair friend, whose violin playing last night afforded you so much pleasure."

Turning in the direction indicated by Mildmay, George discovered that what his friend

said was correct. Approaching them, and walking with that peculiar grace that so charmed him on the previous day, was the lady described on the Pavilion program as Madame Cecilia Cardew. By her side, clad in a velvet coat, and looking even more theatrical than on the previous evening, was Herr Paulus Gravbowski. It was plain that he was in a bad temper, for as the pair passed, he snapped out something at his companion that brought a look of pain into her face. She pretended, however, not to notice his rudeness, and walked on as proudly as before.

"To use schoolboy slang," said Mildmay, when the pair had passed, "I should say that our fair friend is catching it."

"The beast!" George replied indignantly. "He ought to be ashamed of himself. What right has he to insult her in public like that? I'd give something to be able to teach him manners."

Mildmay glanced at him out of the corner of his eye before he replied. Assuredly he had never before known his friend betray such interest in a member of the opposite sex.

"I wonder in what relation they stand to each other?" he asked, picking up the paper as he spoke.

This question, coming so pat upon his own thoughts, proved too much for Kilvert.

"Come, come," he said irritably, "what on earth has that got to do with us?"

"My dear fellow," said Mildmay, "there is no sort of reason why you should have anything to do with us. As for me, you know I never worry myself about anything."

"Then let's go in to lunch," said George, throwing another glance after the pair, who were now crossing the road by the bandstand.

I have already said that Mildmay was essentially a kindly little man. I am going to give you a good and sufficient proof of it. Unobservant as he had appeared to be, he was, nevertheless, well aware that his host had taken a sudden and violent interest in one at least of the pair of musicians then performing on the pier. For that reason, when they had lunched, and Kilvert inquired in what way they should amuse themselves that afternoon, he took the bull by the horns, and suggested that they should pay a visit to the Pavilion.

"I see from the program hanging in the hall," he said, "that the lady we saw this morning is going to play Handel's Sonata in A major. Of all the works for the violin of which I am fond, that comes first."

"I don't believe you know anything about it," was his companion's uncompromising reply; and then, with an ingenuousness that he flattered himself would deceive his friend, he

added, "However, if you are bent upon going, I will go with you."

At the appointed time they made their way along the pier towards the Pavilion. The afternoon performance was, as a rule, of a somewhat higher character than that of the evening. It was certainly so in this case. The lady who had sung the coon song on the previous night now appeared in fashionable attire, and sang one of the latest ballads by a popular composer; while the gentleman who had rendered "I Fear no Foe" with such vigor, followed her with a solo from the "Flying Dutchman." When he had been heartily applauded and had made his exit, George felt as if all the blood in his body was flying to his head. Then the curtain was drawn aside, and once more Madame Cardew stood looking down upon her audience. To the infatuated young man in the third row of chairs it seemed as if she were paler than usual, and some innate sympathy made him feel that she was laboring under the influence of some considerable emotion. Once, in the middle of one of the easiest passages, she well-nigh broke down. Her accompanist flashed a look at her from the piano that to Kilvert's mind was full of malignity. She recovered herself instantly, and continued her performance apparently as if she had not noticed it. Not so Mildmay's companion; he remembered

his dream of the previous night, and felt as if he could invade the platform and hurl off it the man who sat there.

The performance at an end, the girl bowed to her audience and disappeared, whereupon Kilvert made an excuse to his companion, and went out into the open air. Something told him that Madame Cardew would also leave the Pavilion, and, as events turned out, he was right. She was standing by the brass bell, already referred to, looking out to sea, her hands clasped on the rail before her, and her shoulders shaking as if with sobs. That she was in serious trouble was beyond all doubt. George felt that he would have given anything to have been able to go up to her and to have inquired what that trouble was, and if possible to have helped her. Under the circumstances, however, such a thing was impossible. She would in all probability deeply resent his interference, and in that case his well-meant kindness would do more harm than good. He accordingly walked to the other side of the pier, where he stood looking down into the green water below. Once more he endeavored to argue with himself. The whole affair was really too absurd, he told himself; he had neither seen nor heard of the girl until the previous day, and when he returned to London, they would in all human probability never meet again. Why, therefore,

should he exercise his mind so much about her? And yet with it all there was always that little voice at the back of his brain telling him, over and over again, and with unmistakable clearness, that Fate had willed that they should meet, and that such meeting was destined to prove the one great crisis of his life. Never before had he been so impressed by any one. There had been numerous little love episodes dotted like milestones on the pathway of his life, and more than once he had entertained a suspicion that he had met the woman he would make his wife. In every case, however, he had been disillusioned before it was too late. Now, however, everything seemed different. He had not addressed a word to the girl—he did not even know whether she was single or married ; she might be the purest or the basest of her sex; yet with it all he felt certain, why he could not say, that the threads of their two lives were inextricably interwoven for Good or Ill. He felt a sudden impulse to go back and speak to her, to offer her his help at any cost ; but when he turned with this intention, it was only to discover that the man, to whom he had taken such a dislike, had come out to her, and they were now walking back to the Pavilion together. Presuming that she was returning in order to prepare for her next number, George also made his way back to the concert hall.

"Well, my friend," said Mildmay, when the other took his seat beside him, "I hope you enjoyed your cigarette. I have been amusing myself during your absence studying that curious anomaly, the British *paterfamilias* at the seaside. Just look at that old fellow over there."

He indicated a stout and respectable old gentleman seated on their right. From his appearance he might have been a member of the Stock Exchange, a Solicitor, or a prosperous Bank Manager.

"I'll be bound he spends the greater part of his life indoors," Mildmay continued, "yet here he is on his holiday, and on a beautiful afternoon, sitting under a glass roof, not enjoying the music, mark you, but sleeping off the effects of what has probably been a remarkably heavy luncheon, to the strains of music, which, you can see for yourself, he does not care a scrap about. It's really very curious."

George was about to reply when the curtain was once more drawn aside, and Madame Cardew appeared upon the stage. However agitated she might have been when she stood at the end of the pier, she showed no sign of emotion now. She played an old English air, and, securing an encore, followed it with a melody by Chopin. After which she bowed and left the stage.

This was the last item on the program, and the two men quitted the hall together.

"Madame Cardew is certainly very beautiful," remarked Mildmay, as they walked down the pier, "but I am afraid she is not happy. Herr Paulus does not strike me as being an amiable gentleman. If he is, his face certainly belies him."

George said nothing in reply to this speech. He was afraid to discuss the matter too much with Mildmay, lest his friend's suspicions should be aroused. He was not quite certain that this had not happened already, for the little man was a sharp observer, and it was not very much that escaped his notice.

After dinner they adjourned to the club, of which Mildmay, on George's introduction, had been made an honorary member. Whist was the order of the evening, and for an hour and a half George managed to fix his attention sufficiently on the cards to save himself and his partner from absolute defeat. At last he felt that he could play no longer, and, when the rubber was finished, rose from the table.

"I am afraid I must ask you to excuse me," he said. "I have a splitting headache, and can scarcely see the pips on the cards. I must go out for some fresh air."

Mildmay offered to accompany him, but this Kilvert would not hear of.

"Get somebody else to come in, and continue your game," he said. "The night is young, and, as I have reason to observe, you're in excellent form to-night. Make hay while the sun shines ; I'll have my revenge later on."

Then, when he had seen a local lawyer installed in his place, George donned his hat and coat, and, having lit a cigar, went out into the cool night air. He had certainly been troubled by a headache that evening. The fresh sea breeze, however, soon blew it away, and by the time he reached the entrance to the pier, he was scarcely conscious of it. Passing on to the pier, he made his way in the direction of the Pavilion. It was like a loadstone ; he could no more have stayed away from it than he could have flown over it. As it happened, however, he was only just in time to see Madame Cardew and her accompanist make their bows to the audience and retire.

"Confound that wretched whist!" he muttered to himself. "If only the fellows had not hung about so over the last rubber, I should have been here in time."

Feeling out of elbows with himself and the world, he left the Pavilion, and walked slowly down the pier towards the exit. In one of the shelters he paused to light a fresh cigar. As he threw away the match, he descried the two figures with which by this time he was well

familiar, coming towards him. He remained where he was in order to allow of their passing before he continued his walk. He had no thought of playing the part of an eavesdropper, but so close were they to him that it was impossible to avoid hearing a portion of their conversation,

"You will do as I bid you," said the man in German, of which language Kilvert had some knowledge. "If you do not, you know the consequences."

"I shall do nothing of the kind," the girl answered in the same tongue; "and when I say it, you know that I mean it. Be careful how you try to force me. I am desperate, and there is no knowing what I may do."

They had passed Kilvert by this time, and he heard no more. Passionate though her utterance had been, there was no mistaking the music of her voice. Scarcely conscious of what he was doing, George followed them, watched them pass through the turnstiles, and then, to his astonishment, saw the man cross the road, while his companion turned sharp to the right, and walked quickly towards the Esplanade. A mocking laugh came from the man, but the woman appeared not to notice it. She simply hurried along the broad promenade, against the buttresses of which the high tide was breaking in showers of foam. George

remembered the last words he had overheard: "I am desperate, and there is no knowing what I may do."

Why had she left her companion, and for what reason was she hurrying like this into the darkness? He did not wait to consider, but, throwing caution to the winds, set off in pursuit.

CHAPTER III.

As I said at the conclusion of the previous chapter, the wind was steadily rising, and great sheets of spray were being blown across the Esplanade. The black form in front of Kilvert had had a considerable start, and it was with some difficulty that he managed to keep her in sight. Where was she going? What was she going to do? It was not long before she had passed the opening in the chains, at the point where he had seen her cross the road that morning. If she had then been proceeding to her lodgings, as he had supposed, it was quite evident that she was not going home now. Cramming his hat tighter on his head, he increased his pace. But still the swiftly moving figure ahead bore steadily on. At last they reached the end of the Esplanade, and began to climb the steep ascent of the cliff that there commenced.

"My God!" cried George to himself, in an agony of apprehension, "I was right after all. I believe she intends to kill herself!"

Thereupon he commenced to run up the winding path after her as fast as it was possible

to go. The wind at the top was blowing great guns, and the sound of the waves on the rocks below reached him like distant thunder. He thought of the girl in front of him, and, in a flash of mental photography, of which he was vaguely, but not wholly, sensible, compared her, as he had seen her scarcely a quarter of an hour before, bowing her acknowledgments from the stage of the Pavilion, with the picture she now presented, flying before the storm on what he felt only too sure was an errand of self-destruction.

At the top of the cliffs was open country, partly heath, but mainly grass-land. At intervals, shelters had been erected by the town authorities, cozy little boxes in which, after dark, love-making couples were wont to hide themselves. At this hour of the night, however, all were empty, given over to the seagulls, who wheeled above them, and to the rabbits, who found shelter from the wind beneath the seats. A hundred yards from the point where the path from the Esplanade reaches the top of the cliff is a large open space surrounded by furze bushes. Here the figure that George was so vigorously pursuing paused, and stood for a moment as if undecided what to do, or which way go. Then she appeared to make up her mind, for she began to move swiftly towards the cliff edge, but not too fast

for the man behind her, who, divining her intention, dashed forward, and, when she was scarcely a dozen paces from the edge, seized her in his arms. It was a desperate moment for both.

"Let me go!" she cried fiercely in English, struggling in his arms, "let me go! You don't know what you are doing!"

She little knew the man with whom she had to deal, however. His strong arms were clasped about her, and in them he carried her back to the nearest shelter, some fifty yards distant. Reaching it, he placed her tenderly upon a seat, and then drew back a pace.

"God help me!" she cried hysterically, putting her hands up to her eyes as she spoke, as if anxious to shut out the remembrance of what she intended doing. "Oh, God help me!"

"God help you indeed!" said George. "Thank Heaven, I was in time to save you!"

For upwards of a minute neither of them spoke. The wind whistled round the shelter, and the waves broke on the rocks below with never-ceasing regularity. Then from the girl there came a stream of protests.

"Oh, why did you stop me?" she repeated, wringing her hands and sobbing. "Why did you not let me do it?"

"Because I could not let you throw your life away like that," he answered passionately.

"Is it of so little value to you that you treat it so lightly?"

"What is my life to me?" she retorted. "If you knew my story you would not have stopped me." Then, with almost passionate protest, she contiued, "It appeared such an easy, such a small thing to do. I thought I had only to come up here and throw myself over, and all would be at an end. Now that you have stopped me, it will all have to be done again."

"Never!" he answered. "You must not think of such a thing again. Has not this one attempt proved enough for you, without your wanting to face that ordeal again!"

She did not answer, but gazed steadily in front of her from the dark corner. Then a fit of weeping took possession of her, and she rocked herself to and fro, sobbing meanwhile as if her heart would break. After a time she calmed a little, and George took his place beside her on the seat.

"Madame Cardew," he said, "will you believe that, although we have never spoken until now, I am almost sincerely anxious to prove myself your friend?"

She started on hearing him utter her name. "How do you know who I am?" she asked. "I do not know that I have ever seen you before."

"And I had never seen you until yesterday,

when I stood beside you at the bookstall at Victoria Station," he answered. "I saw you again in the Pavilion last evening, and to-night you passed me on the pier. From what I overheard you say, I gathered that you were in distress. When I saw your companion desert you, I took the liberty of following you, and this is the result. I do not know what your trouble may be, but if you will accept a friendship, which is none the less real because it has been so short a time in existence, I will do all that is in my power to serve you. Am I right in supposing that Herr Paulus has been cruel to you?"

A shudder ran over her as he mentioned the man's name.

"What do you know of him?" she asked in a startled tone.

"Nothing but what I have seen," Kilvert answered. "That, however, has been sufficient to show me that you are far from happy with him. I have not known you long enough to think of asking you to share your trouble with me, but will you believe me if I say that should there be anything I can do to make your lot happier, I will pledge myself to help you most gladly—and without asking further questions?"

She heaved a heavy sigh, but gave him no answer.

"Ah! You do not trust me?" he said, rising to his feet.

"It is not that," she answered. "God knows that I stand in need of help! But I have never spoken to you before, and it seems impossible that any one should be desirous of helping one so miserable as I am."

"Why will you not let me show you how wrong that impression is?" he asked. "I want no reward—I ask no return or recompense."

"Alas! there is nothing you can do," she replied. "I have my burden to bear, and I must bear it until the end. I thought and hoped that that end would have come to-night, but you have prevented it. And now I must go back to my misery. Heaven help me!"

"If only you would tell me everything, I feel sure I *could* help you," he said. "Surely you cannot be beyond the reach of assistance?"

"Alas! I am beyond the reach of everything," she answered, with a sadness in her voice that cut George like a knife. "Beyond the reach of everything! I doubt if, in all the history of the world, there has been a woman so helpless and so forlorn as I."

George did not know what to say in comfort. She was plainly disinclined to allow him to help her, and for this reason he felt that he could not thrust herself upon her. To prolong

the situation, therefore, could only be painful for both.

"I am sorry," he said, "that you will not permit me to be as useful as I should have liked to have been; but if you will not allow me to assist you in your trouble, I can at least escort you back to your lodgings. But, before we start, I am going to ask you to give me one solemn promise."

"What is it?" she inquired, rising and standing before him like the figure of Tragedy.

"It is that you will never again attempt what I saved you from to-night?"

She paused before she replied.

"I will promise you that," she answered slowly. Then, putting her hands to her face, as if to shut out some painful thought, she continued, "O God! to think what I might be now had you not stopped me!"

"Fortunately I *did* stop you," said Kilvert. "Now we had better be returning to the town. The sooner you reach home the better."

With that they left the shelter, and turned their faces towards Beachcombe. The wind buffeted them continuously, and, to add to their discomfort, a thick drizzle was falling. In silence they descended the cliff, and reached the Esplanade once more.

"May I ask where you are staying?" asked George.

"At Number 13, Beach Street," she answered. "Believe me, it is not necessary for you to come with me. I can find my way there easily."

"Forgive me," said George, "but I shall not rest happy unless I see you safely to your own door."

They crossed the road, and made their way in the direction of the street she had indicated. It was a semi-fashionable thoroughfare, most of the residences being boarding-houses of a superior description. When they were halfway down the street, the girl stopped and turned to George.

"It may seem wicked of me to say so," she said, "but I don't know whether I should be grateful to you or not for what you have done for me to-night."

"I have no desire that you should be," he answered. "I am only too thankful that I followed you. But there is something more that I want to say. You have given me one promise—I am going to ask you to give me another."

"And what is it?" she asked, with a touch of suspicion in her voice.

"It is not a very great one," he said. "It is that you will let me give you my name and address, and that, should you ever be in trouble again, you will communicate with me at once."

She hesitated before she answered. "I could

not do that," she answered. "You must see yourself that I am unable to accept help from one I do not know, but I thank you none the less. If you knew everything you would shun me like the plague."

George shook his head. He would never believe that.

"I shall always believe in you," he replied; and then added, "in your goodness and purity —always—to my dying day."

At the time he did not realize that this was a somewhat strange speech to make to a girl to whom he had never addressed a word until an hour before. But then, as he afterwards admitted to himself, it was only in keeping with the whole affair.

Then she began to move towards the steps of the house before which they stood, and the young man realized that if he had anything else to say to her it must be said at once.

"Pray forgive me if I appear impertinent," he said, "but there is one question that it is vitally necessary that I should ask of you, and yet I am loth to offend you."

"What is it?" she asked. "If I am at liberty to answer it, I will do so. I owe you that at least."

"I see on the Pavilion program that your name is announced as Madame Cardew," he said; and then added almost timidly, "I heard

that man, your accompanist, speak roughly to you. May I ask in what relationship you stand to him?"

"None whatever," she answered hastily, and with what George believed to be a shudder. "He adopted me when I was a little child, and I have lived with him ever since as his daughter —that is all."

She must have heard the muttered "Thank God!" which escaped George's lips, for she made another movement towards the steps.

"And you are not married?" he asked.

"I am not," she answered coldly.

"I will not keep you longer," he said, in a different tone to that in which he had last addressed her. "You are wet and cold."

Then, taking a card from his pocket, he handed it to her.

"May I give you my card?" he asked. "It will tell you who I am if such a thing can interest you. As I said just now, should you ever be in trouble and in need of help, I can only ask you to believe that if you will allow me, I will serve you to the death, and only too gladly."

"I thank you," she answered simply. "And now 'Good night.'"

She ascended the steps, while he set off quickly in the direction of the sea front. It seemed to him that he had lived a lifetime in the last

hour. Her voice still rang in his ears, and the haunting look in her eyes was continually before him. Reaching the street facing the Esplanade, he strode quickly along the pavement towards his hotel. The night watchman admitted him, and informed him that Mr. Mildmay had left a message to the effect that he was tired and had gone to bed.

"I am glad indeed to hear that," George muttered to himself; he felt that he could not have borne the questioning to which his friend would have subjected him.

He accordingly ascended to his room, where Edwards waited upon him with serene imperturbability, as if rain-soaked clothes and mud-stained boots played a usual part of a gentleman's evening attire. When he had left the room, George threw himself into an easy-chair, and tried to arrive at a proper understanding with himself. He was aware by this time that he was hopelessly, irretrievably in love with the beautiful woman whose life he had, to all intents and purposes, saved that night. It was a true case of that mysterious malady, the idea of which he had so often ridiculed, "love at first sight." Happen what might, he told himself he intended to go through with it now that he had her assurance from her own lips that she was not the wife of the man to whom he had taken such a dislike. He knew nothing of her

former life, nothing of her parents or upbringing, but he had looked into her face, and, having done so, was prepared to stake his happiness on her honesty and purity. Having arrived at this resolution, he went to bed, and, contrary to his expectations slept like a top from the time his head touched the pillow until Edwards called him next morning.

When he looked out upon the world again he discovered a miserable day. Rain was pouring down in sheets, the sea rolled in in sullen gray-green waves, while the chains on the posts of the Esplanade swung mournfully to and fro in the wind. The outer cheerlessness had its effect upon him, for by the time he had finished his breakfast, George's spirits had sunk to the lowest depths. Mildmay saw this, and forbore to put any questions he might otherwise have asked concerning his friend's doings after they had parted on the previous night.

"For cheerfulness commend me to the seaside on a wet day," said the little man, as they stood in the vestibule after breakfast, looking out upon the streaming pavements and the umbrella-laden pedestrians who hurried by. "For my part, give me a comfortable chair at the club and the daily papers. My insignificant frame was never intended to combat the elements."

"I suppose we shall have to spend the morn-

ing at the club," George remarked dismally. "So far as I can see there is nothing else left for us."

He would have given anything to have been able to go round to Beach Street on the mere chance of seeing Madame Cardew. He knew, however, that such a call could scarcely fail to be regarded by her as an impertinence. He determined, therefore, to accompany Mildmay to the club, and to find what amusement he could there. Dripping umbrellas and streaming mackintoshes decorated the hall of that institution when they reached it, and the head waiter's remark to every incoming member, "A very wet day, sir," became as monotonous as the chiming of a cuckoo clock. They made their way to the smoking-room together, and installed themselves in armchairs in the large bow window overlooking the sea. George, having lit a cigar, appropriated the *Fortnightly Review*, and endeavored to interest himself in its contents. The effort was vain, however. His thoughts continually reverted to another part of the town.

"Heigho!" he said at last, "this sort of thing will not do at all. If I sit here I shall go to sleep, and if I go to sleep I shall wake up in a vile temper, of which you will reap the benefit, my dear Mildmay."

"I am always glad to be useful," said the

man whom he addressed, looking at him over the top of an American magazine. "So far as I am concerned this chair is a remarkably comfortable one, and I was just coming to the conclusion that even wet days have their advantages. You take life too seriously, my dear George. Try to follow my example, and to look at everything from a utilitarian point of view. For instsnce, I am reading an excellent article on the prehistoric arts of the Peruvians. The first page settled me comfortably in my chair; halfway down the second I began to experience a feeling of delightful languor; while the third was just producing a truly soporific effect, when you brought me back to the realities of this troublesome world by complaining that sleep made you bad tempered."

"What nonsense you talk!" said George, irritably.

Still Mildmay was not put out, "Nonsense, my dear fellow," he said, "when you come to think of it, is the oil that greases the wheels of the machinery of life. Does not some poet—I cannot remember who—observe that

'A little nonsense now and then
Is relished by the wisest men?

I don't pretend to be a particularly wise man myself, but I certainly have a decided partiality for nonsense. There was a time when I thought

you had a leaning that way, but ever since we left London your seriousness has been of the most terrible description."

"My dear old boy," George replied, "I am afraid you are having a wretchedly bad time of it. What would you like to do? Shall we hire hacks and go for a ride? We can only get wet through. Shall we purchase clubs and go up to the golf links? If you don't mind the rain, we might chance to get a round. Or shall we we hire a boat and go for a row? If the worst comes to the worst, we can only be seasick!"

"Shall we go on to the housetops and proclaim ourselves lunatics?" Mildmay suggested. "I have often thought a bill ought to be introduced into Parliament to legislate against the oppression of the weaker brethren by the over-energetic. If your neighbor keeps poultry, and the crowing of the matutinal chanticleer disturbs your rest, you can hail him to the police-station with a fair certainty of winning the case. If the picturesque but unwashed Italian will persist in serenading you with the most diabolical musical instrument yet invented for the annoyance of a much-enduring world, you can call in the assistance of the police-constable and have him forcibly removed. Nothing, however, is done to protect the inoffensive individual, who likes to take

life quietly, from his confoundedly energetic brother, whose only idea of happiness is to be racing about, taking what he calls exercise from morning till night. You know the Bracebridges, of course?"

George was standing in the window looking out at the sea, a cigar in his mouth, and his hands thrust deep into his pockets.

"What on earth have the Bracebridges got to do with the point at issue?" he asked, without turning round.

"They illustrate my argument exactly," Mildmay continued, noticing with satisfaction that he was gradually talking George out of his fit of gloom. "In a moment of mental aberration I accepted an invitation to spend Christmas with them, and you may believe it or not, but I have never had such a terrible time of it in my life. You know the fine old place they have down in the country. As far as room and noise is concerned, it is a regluar barrack. No one talks quietly; they all bawl at one as if one were deaf. Everybody comes down to breakfast in an excited state and goes to bed in it. I hadn't been in the house ten minutes before I was carried off at breathless speed to inspect a new hunter just purchased; then back again to the house to eat an enormous afternoon tea, which I knew would give me indigestion and spoil my appetite for dinner, as

it did; then into the hall to witness a new dance which the eldest girl had invented, and which, they all declared, would be the rage of the next season; then to the billiard-room to play pocket badminton over the squire's billiard-table; after dinner a dance; next morning up at nine to go to hunting; home tired out, only to find that charades were the order of the evening, in which I was to act, much against my will. Believe it or not, this sort of thing continued for a week, at the end of which time I returned to town more dead than alive. Now, I contend that all men and women have a right——"

"Oh, bosh!" said George. "You know very well that you don't mean a word of what you are saying." Then, placing his hand on Mildmay's shoulder, he continued, "Don't you think I can see through it all? You have got it into your head that I am miserable about something, and you are talking like this in order to try and cheer me up. As a matter of fact, I *am* miserable, and I don't mind telling you so. It's not the sort of confession I should make to everybody, but you and I are old friends, and I know I can trust you."

Mildmay nodded. It was a way he had when he was really in earnest. Easy-going little man though he was, Edward Mildmay could prove himself a true friend when it came to a pinch.

Moreover, there was no one amongst the circle of his acquaintance that he liked as much as George Kilvert.

"The fact of the matter is," George continued, "I had an extraordinary experience last night. You remember that beautiful violinist?"

Mildmay nodded once more. "Madame Cardew?"

"Yes, Madame Cardew. You will recollect that I left here earlier than you did. Well, I went for a stroll on the pier, and while I was standing in one of the shelters she passed with the man she calls her father."

Mildmay pricked up his ears on hearing this. How had George come to know what she called the man?

"As they passed me I heard the man bullying her in what I expect is his usual fashion. In reply she told him that she was desperate, and that if he continued to treat her as he was doing she might attempt anything. Well, to shorten my story, I followed them down the pier. It was a wretched night, and you can imagine my surprise, when, having seen the man pass the turnstile, I saw him go straight on across the road, while the woman turned to the right, and went along the Esplanade in the direction of the cliffs. Somehow, I don't know why it should have done so, her action

frightened me, and I made up my mind to follow her. This I did, and kept behind her until she reached the third shelter on the top. I now began to see what it was she had in her mind. Reaching the open space just before you get to the chine, she started at a run for the cliff edge."

"And you stopped her?"

"I caught her just in time to prevent her from throwing herself over. Another moment and I should have been too late. There was a bit of a scene afterwards, but eventually I managed to get her home. I tried to learn from her what her trouble was, but she would not tell me. All that I could get out of her was that her life was a very unhappy one, and that the man who calls himself Gravbowski had adopted her when she was a little child."

"You may well call it an extraordinary experience, And now, what do you intend to do?"

"Try and see her again," George replied; "and later, endeavor, to persuade her to marry me."

"Good Heavens, man! Surely you're not serious?" cried Milmay, sitting bolt upright in his chair, with a startled expression upon his face.

"I was never more so in my life," the other replied. "If she will have me, I shall obtain a special licence and marry her at once. My

dear old fellow, I know you think me mad; but, believe me, I am not. My mind is quite made up upon this matter. I have never seen any one like her, and I never shall again."

"But surely you must want to know something more about her before you take such an important step?" Mildmay suggested. "It seems to me like madness."

"It may seem whatever you like. I want to know nothing more than I know now," the infatuated young man replied. "I saw her for the first time the day before yesterday, but I feel as if I've known her all my life."

Mildmay rose from his chair and crossed the room to the fireplace, where he stood looking down into the grate.

"This is a pretty bit of business," he said to himself;—"and yet, by Jove, I don't see what I can do to prevent it. He is in earnest, that's evident; and it's equally evident that he will not hear reason. Of course, the woman will jump at the chance he offers her as soon as she discovers who he is." Then aloud, he continued, "And what is the next step to be?"

"I am going to see her at once and put the question to her," George replied.

At that moment the door opened, and the lawyer who had taken George's place at the whist-table on the previous evening entered the room.

"Horrid day, isn't it?" he said, addressing Kilvert. "The glass is still falling, I see. We're in for a wet week, or I'm very much mistaken."

As he said this he glanced from one man to the other, and realized that the depression was not confined to the weather.

"Nice sort of thing for Beachcombe, this murder, isn't it?" he went on cheerfully, as he seated himself at a writing-table in the corner of the room, and took some notepaper from the rack. "We shall be quite famous for a time."

George did not answer, but Mildmay asked in a casual way to what murder he referred.

"Why, the murder of that musician fellow who has been playing the accompaniments for that beautiful violinist, Madame—I forget her name—at the Pavilion," the other replied. "Haven't you heard that he was found stone dead, stabbed to the heart, in his room this morning *and that the violinist has bolted?*"

CHAPTER IV.

It would be impossible to describe the effect produced upon Kilvert by the lawyer's news. For a moment he stood staring at him as if he could not believe that he had heard aright. Then a sickening feeling of fear swept over him.

"Tell me it again," he said hoarsely. "What is it you know?

The lawyer glanced at him in some surprise. As a rule, Kilvert was a placid, easy-going individual, and, though he had known him for some years, he had never before seen him under the influence of such emotion.

"I mean what I say," the lawyer continued. "From what I have been told, I gather that ever since they have been in the place, the woman and the murdered man have been on the worst of terms. Last night, when they came off the stage at the Pavilion, after finishing their performance, they had a violent quarrel behind the scenes. The manager, I believe, heard them. The man went home alone, while the girl returned an hour later. This morning, when the landlady of the house

went into the sitting-room on the ground floor, which was shared by the pair, she found the man lying upon the floor quite dead, as I have said, stabbed to the heart. She immediately sent for the Police, and a search was instituted for the woman. She, however, had taken time by the forelock, and had disappeared. I don't know whether they have caught her yet, but I should rather fancy not. She probably knows too much for them. But it will cause a rare sensation when they *do* catch her."

I have already remarked that Kilvert senior was a man who, when he made up his mind to do a thing, generally did it, or knew the reason why. It was well known that when he was thwarted, or put out by anything, his mouth took a curious expression not very pleasant to look upon, particularly if you happened to be the person at issue with him. His son had inherited that expression, and it was to be seen on his face now. He advanced a step or two towards the lawyer.

"You don't mean to tell me," he said, "that it is your opinion that she killed Gravbowski?"

"I should think it more than probable," the other replied idly, and without noticing the thunderclouds gathering on Kilvert's face. "As far as I can see, the facts of the case seem to point to it."

"Then the facts of the case lie," Kilvert returned hotly. "That is all I can say about it. The evidence may be as incriminating as you please, but I will stake my life on Madame Cardew's innocence. And you can tell any one you please that I say so."

With that he walked out of the room, leaving Mildmay and the lawyer regarding each other in blank amazement.

"I hope I haven't put my foot in it," said the lawyer, apologetically. "It looks confoundedly like it, though. I'd no idea they even knew each other."

Mildmay did not reply, but left the room in pursuit of his friend. He found him in the hall putting on his coat.

"What are you going to do, old man?" he inquired, almost timidly.

"I am going round to Beach Street at once to make inquiries," George replied. "Don't bother about me."

"But I must bother," returned the other, taking his hat from the peg. "I'm coming with you. It's possible I may be of use."

"God bless you, Mildmay!" Kilvert replied. "If you will come I shall be very glad to have you. I can scarcely believe there is any truth in this terrible news yet."

As he said this they left the club and passed out into the street. Then, putting up their

umbrellas, they set off along the streaming pavements in the direction of the street where the murder, of which they had just heard, had taken place. Not a word was spoken during the time it took them to traverse the distance. Mildmay had nothing to say, and George felt as if his tongue were tied with horror. At last they turned into Beach Street. On entering it they became aware of a small crowd standing in front of a house which proved to be No. 13. In order that the irony of Fate should be the more apparent, it was borne in upon the young man as they approached the house that it was his own property. In fact, he was not quite certain that the whole street did not belong to him. Never before had one of his worthy father's investments been brought home to him in such an appalling fashion. Pushing their way through the crowd, they ascended the steps leading to the front door. A policeman on duty there checked their further progress.

"There's no admittance, sir," he said, addressing George, who happened to be nearest to him.

"But, my good fellow, I want to see the landlady," George replied.

"I can't help that, sir," said the policeman, civilly but firmly. "My orders was strict not to let any one whatsoever enter the house.

You must see for yourself, sir, that I can't go against them."

In the condition he was then in, it is possible that in another moment George would have lost his temper, and might probably have made a scene. Fortunately, however, for his dignity, a police Inspector crossed the street at that moment and came towards them.

"Here's the Inspector, sir," said the constable. "You'd better ask him whether you can go in or not."

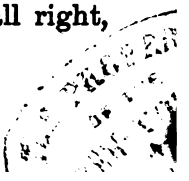
The individual in question ascended the steps and eyed Kilvert and Mildmay critically. It was plain that he supposed them to be representatives of the Press.

"I am afraid I cannot admit you," he said at last, when the situation had been explained to him. "Of course, we are always very glad to do what we can for the papers, but——"

"You surely don't think I am a reporter, do you?" said George. "My name is Kilvert, George Kilvert, and I fancy I am fairly well known here."

The Inspector's manner changed immediately. Every one in Beachcombe was familiar with that name. As a matter of fact, it transpired later that the Inspector himself lived in one of Mr. Kilvert's cottages.

"I'm sure I beg your pardon," he said. "I had no idea of your identity. It's all right,



Dodson ; I'll take Mr. Kilvert and his friend in myself."

He rang the bell, and the door was immediately opened to him by the constable who was on guard inside.

"Step inside, if you please, gentlemen," said the Inspector ; "then perhaps you will tell me what I can do for you."

They followed him into the hall, or rather into a linoleum-covered passage, containing an umbrella-stand, a hat-rack, and two wooden chairs.

"I came to try and see the landlady," George began. "I take a very deep interest in Madame Cardew, and it is in the hope of learning something about her that I am here."

"I am afraid that there is very little to be told about that lady, sir, except that she has disappeared," the man answered. "As a matter of fact, we are anxious to discover all we can about her ourselves. But you can see the landlady if you want to, and see what she has to say on the subject. I fear she is not much wiser than we are. I will send for her."

This he immediately did.

When the latter appeared, she proved to be a small, fragile woman, with a pinched, miserable face, large hollow eyes, and with a general air of being a martyr to indigestion.

"Oh, sir," she began, on hearing that it was

her landlord who stood before her, "this has been a terrible business indeed. I never thought to see such a thing as long as I lived. It's certain sure I shall never let my front room again, for folk will always say that they can't live in a room in which there has been a murder committed. I wouldn't have had it happened for all the money in the world. And he such an old man, and she such a——"

She would in all probability have continued in this strain for an interminable period, but George cut her short by asking her at what hour she had last seen Madame Cardew.

"As I told Mr. Inspector here," the woman continued, "if I drop down dead this very moment, I can only say that I didn't see her after she went out to the concert last night. She and her father—she called him father, though you must know he wasn't really her father, being only adopted, as the saying goes —had their tea and went away together. He came home just after eleven. But it was between twelve and half-past before I heard the front door shut again. Oh, sir, I can't believe it was her as did it, really I can't! It don't seem possible. She was a sweet young lady, if ever there was one, and terrible set upon by that man."

As she said this she nodded her head in the direction of the sitting-room.

"Have you any idea what time it was when she left the house?" George inquired.

"I couldn't tell you that if 'twas to save my life," the woman answered. "You see, sir, none of us knew that she was gone until after the murder was discovered. Good Lord! it did give me such a turn. I went in there to draw the blinds and open the shutters, and there he was, lying stretched out upon the floor. I thought I should have dropped down dead!"

"When will the inquest be held?" George inquired, turning to the Inspector.

"This afternoon, sir," the man replied.

"And where?"

"At the Queen's Head Hotel, at four o'clock."

"In that case you had better tell them to call me as a witness. I don't know that my evidence will be worth very much, but, such as it is, the Coroner may as well have it."

"We will bear the fact in mind, sir," the Inspector answered; and then Mildmay and George left the house.

A subpœna calling upon him to attend and give evidence at the inquest on the body of one, Paulus Gravbowski, arrived an hour or so later.

"My dear old George, I cannot tell you how I sympathize with you," said Mildmay, and held out his hand.

"I feel sure that you do," George replied. "It is a terrible business."

For my own part, however, I fancy Mildmay heaved a sigh of relief as he realized the fact that his friend would now, in all probability, not be able to carry out his mad proposal. And this only goes to prove that, long as Mildmay had known Kilvert, he had not then realized the other's tenacity of purpose.

When George and his friend reached the Queen's Head Hotel that afternoon, they found it in a state of wild excitement. The street outside was crowded, while the bar inside was doing a roaring trade.

"And of all this mob, there is not one who will believe in her innocence," said George bitterly to himself, as they passed through the hotel to the large room at the back of the house in which the Inquest was to be held. "God help her, poor girl!"

"My dear sir," said the Coroner, rising as they entered, and coming across the room to shake hands, "this is very kind of you. We have just returned from viewing the body, and are now ready to begin the proceedings. Let me offer you a chair."

When they were seated, the Coroner took his place with a great show of dignity, and then the Inquest commenced.

The first witness called was the landlady of the house in which the murder had been committed. As if to add to the value of what she

had to tell, she had dressed herself in the deepest mourning, and punctuated her evidence with lamentations.

The murdered man and the woman, who was stated to be his adopted daughter, had reached her house on the preceding Tuesday, two days before the murder had been committed. She was unable to say how they came to hear of her house, but supposed they had been sent to her by the people at the Pavilion, who knew that many of their artists were in the habit of staying with her. The deceased, in her opinion, was a bad-tempered man, and, to quote the witness's own words, was "continually snarling and nagging at the lady." Madame Cardew, on the other hand, was very quiet, and, again to use the witness's words, "behaved herself like a perfect angel, let alone a lady." On the night of the murder, she, the witness, met her on the stairs an hour or so before she left for the concert, and noticed that she was crying. It was not until some time after midnight that she heard the door again "shut to." She presumed that it was Madame Cardew returning, and did not think any more of it at the time. In answer to a question put by the Coroner, she replied that it was her custom to furnish her lodgers with latch-keys, in order that they might let themselves in at any hour of the night, without disturbing the rest of the

household. She then went on to allude to the finding of the body, indulging in many references to the state of her feelings, which she described as being "all of a twitter," and a pathetic allusion to the damage done to the carpet and her house's reputation. The body was lying on its face, she said, and it was not until she saw the pool of blood beside it that she knew it was a case of murder. She was quite certain that there was no knife in the wound, and, so far as she knew, in the room. When she had mastered her emotion, she sent for the police, and handed the case over to them.

Dr. Hutton-Browne was next called. He deposed to the fact that at half-past seven o'clock that morning he had been called by the police to No. 13, Beach Street. On entering the room he found the body of the deceased upon the floor in the position described by the last witness. From the examination he made he should say that death had occurred at least six hours previous to the discovery of the crime. That it was not a case of Suicide was proved by the fact that the man had been stabbed from behind between the shoulder-blades. There were also marks of fingers upon the throat, which, in his opinion, showed that the deceased man had been tightly held in order that he should not cry out. The examination of the wound led him to

believe that it had been caused by a knife, or a dagger with a double edge. It had penetrated the lungs and heart, and death in consequence must have been instantaneous. Though he had looked about carefully, and had also seen the police do so, he could not discover a knife or weapon of any sort. In his opinion it would be impossible to say whether the marks upon the throat were caused by male or female fingers.

The police-constable who had been called in by the landlady was next sworn. His evidence was mainly corroborative as to the finding of the body, and to the dispatch of a messenger for a doctor. Madame Cardew was not then in the house.

A detective sergeant from the Criminal Investigation Department of Scotland Yard followed the policeman, and informed the court that on his arrival at Beachcombe he had visited the house in question, and had overhauled the effects of the dead man, and also the belongings of the woman known as Madame Cardew. He was unable to discover anything, however, that would tend to throw a light upon the mystery. The missing woman's luggage consisted of her personal wardrobe, a quantity of music, and a few books. He found no weapon of any sort or description.

William George Hancock, manager of the Pavilion on the pier, was the next witness.

He stated that he was responsible for the engagement of the artists who appeared at the concert hall on the pier, and that, having heard of Madame Cardew's success as a violinist from a brother manager, he had engaged her for a series of six concerts. He understood that Herr Paulus Gravbowski was her adopted father. The old gentleman was very irritable and dictatorial. He had heard from one of his employees that there had been words between the pair on the evening of the murder, but knew nothing more of it.

James Henderson, an employee at the Pavilion, on hearing his name called, made his way up to the table with an air of great importance. For once in his life he felt that he was playing a public part, and prided himself on the importance of the evidence he was about to give. He certified to the fact that the murdered man and Madame Cardew had performed at the Pavilion on the previous evening. They had already done so twice before. It was very plain to all the employees that they were not on the best of terms. Madame was a quiet, nice-tempered lady, but the old gentleman was very far from being the same. He complained to the manager about the piano, behaved rudely to the attendants, and did not allow his daughter, as she was supposed to be, a moment's peace. On the previous evening, after the performance was over,

they seemed to be having a big quarrel, but as they spoke in German, the witness was unable to say what it was about. They had left the Pavilion together.

There was a flutter of excitement in the room when the name of George Kilvert was called. The latter rose and advanced towards the table in the centre of the room. Having been sworn, he asked to be allowed to give his evidence in the form of a narrative. He stated that he had been standing on the pier when the dead man and his adopted daughter passed. Gravbowski was undoubtedly goading her to desperation—indeed, she said so. He had strolled down the pier after them, and had seen them separate at the corner of the Esplanade. His suspicions were aroused by the manner in which the lady hurried along the sea front, and he immediately made up his mind to follow her. A sensation was caused when he described what had taken place on the cliff. In reply to a question by one of the jurymen, he declared that she had given no reason for her conduct save that she was most unhappy. Feeling sure that she ought not to be allowed to go home alone, he had accompanid her as far as No. 13, Beach Street, and had left her there. At that time she seemed repentant concerning what she had tried to do, and had given him her promise that she would not attempt it again. The Coroner then inquired if

it would be possible for him to give them the exact time at which the interview had taken place. Kilvert replied that he was unable to speak with any great degree of certainty. He supposed, however, that it must have been between twelve and a quarter-past. When asked if he had any theory to account for the disappearance of Madame Cardew, he replied that, knowing the condition in which her nerves were that evening, he thought she had entered the house, had found her adopted father dead, and had then gone out to accomplish what she had tried unsuccessfully to do an hour before.

This concluded the evidence, and then the Coroner stated his intention of adjourning the Inquiry for two days, in order that the police might have time to make further investigations concerning the antecedents of the couple, and also that a search might be made for the missing woman.

George and Mildmay left the court together. The former was very despondent.

"I am afraid my evidence has prejudiced her case," he said sadly; "and yet, what was I to do? It had to be given."

"And what are you going to do now?" asked Mildmay.

"Telegraph to my lawyers in town to send me down the cleverest private detective they can find," George replied without hesitation.

"Even if the poor girl is dead, as I sadly fear, no stone shall be left unturned to prove her innocence. If she is still alive, then there is all the more reason that the real murderer should be discovered."

On their way to their hotel they accordingly stopped at the post-office, where George despatched the necessary message to the firm of solicitors who had the looking after of his multitudinous affairs. An hour later a reply reached him to the effect that they were sending down Jacob Burrell, "the cleverest man of his kind in England."

"I would bet any money the junior partner sent that message," said George, as he handed the telegram to Mildmay. "Had it been old Ephgraves, he would have left out the eulogium, or have added, 'as we are credibly informed.'"

"It seems to me I have heard of this fellow Burrell before," Mildmay replied. "Let me think for a moment. Oh, I have it! Do you remember that extraordinary case of last year in which young Henderson,—Godfrey Henderson the artist—was concerned? It came out at the trial that the fellow Fensden, who used to write the *fin-de-siècle* poetry, really committed the murder. The hands of the murdered woman were sent as a wedding present to Henderson."

"Now you mention the hands, I remember

the case perfectly," George replied. "What about it?"

"Why, if I am not mistaken, it was this fellow Burrell who knocked the bottom out of the mystery, and, by bringing Fensden's guilt to light, proved Henderson to be innocent. It was regarded as a very smart bit of work."

"All the better for me, then," George returned. "If Burrell likes a mystery, he'll surely be able to find it in this case. Let him prove conclusively that she had no hand in it, as I firmly believe myself, and he shall have such a reward as he never received before."

He rang the bell, and when it was answered, told the servant that he expected a gentleman named Burrell down from London that evening.

"Let him be shown into a private room, and see that I am informed at once," he added.

Having given these instructions, he forwarded a note to the police Authorities asking them to communicate with him at once should they receive any news of Madame Cardew, and then composed himself to wait for Burrell's arrival with what patience he could command.

They had just finished dinner, and were sitting in the smoking-room, when a servant entered with a card upon a salver. George picked it up and glanced at it. Turning to Mildmay, he said—

"Mr. Jacob Burrell has arrived."

CHAPTER V.

As soon as they were informed of the famous detective's arrival, George and Mildmay descended the stairs, and made their way to the room into which he had been shown. There they discovered a tall, stout man, perhaps fifty years of age, awaiting their coming. His face was large, red, clean shaven, and very pleasant to look upon. The width of his shoulders was enormous, and suggestive of herculean strength. He was dressed in a suit of check tweeds, and wore a spotted bird's eye neckcloth under a low collar. Taken altogether, his appearance was that of a prosperous farmer or horse-dealer, rather than that of a man whose business in life it was to unravel the tangled threads of crime and to run down criminals.

"Mr. Burrell, I presume?" said George, advancing and holding out his hand.

"That is my name," said Burrell, with a smile, as if he looked upon the mere fact of his name being Burrell as an exceedingly amusing circumstance. "Jacob Burrell, sir, at your service. I gather that you have received a

communication from Messrs. Ephgraves and Son, which will account for my visit."

"Yes," George replied. "The Messrs. Ephgraves are my lawyers, and I telegraphed to them this afternoon to send me down at once the cleverest private detective they could find. They have paid you the compliment of assigning you that position."

"It's pleasant, sir, to be well spoken of," said the detective, rubbing his large hands together in evident appreciation. "I've worked out two or three nice little cases for the Messrs. Ephgraves. And now, sir," he went on, "perhaps you will be good enough to tell me what I can have the pleasure of doing for you. I always believe in getting to business as soon as possible."

"You have heard, of course, of the murder of Herr Paulus Gravbowski, the pianist?" said George.

"I read the account of it in the evening papers on the way down," said Burrell, sitting bolt upright in his chair with his thumbs in the armholes of his waistcoat, "and also of the disappearance of his female companion."

"Well, it is with regard to that case that I sent for you," George replied. "I am more interested in it than I can tell you."

Burrell looked sharply at George before he spoke. Then he said:

"I hope, sir, you won't think me rude if I put two or three very plain questions to you. In a case like this, you see, I'm in very much the same position as a doctor. To come to a proper understanding of a patient's ailment he must not beat about the bush. A detective must not do so either."

"You can put whatever questions to me you like," George replied. "I must ask you, however, to treat the answers I give you as strictly confidential."

"Of course, sir," the man answered. "That goes without saying. I am like the lawyer and the father confessor. What you tell me goes no further. "Now, sir, my first question is: Does your interest in the case embrace both parties, the man and the woman?"

"No, it does not," George said,

"Then, if I may hazard a guess, it concerns itself with the lady alone?"

"That is so," answered George.

"She is described as a very beautiful woman. She also is a travelling musician, is she not?—going about from one town to another, playing at concerts. May I ask how far your interest with her goes?"

George paused in considerable embarrassment. "I saw her for the first time two days ago. I spoke to her for the first time at eleven o'clock last night. But as surely as I sit here,

should I be able to find her again, and can prove her innocence of the charge which I am sure will be preferred against her, I shall endeavor to persuade her to become my wife."

It was very plain that both George and Mildmay expected the detective to show some surprise at the announcement. He did not do so, however, but contemplated his right boot for a moment, and then asked George to describe their meeting. The young man did so, dwelling upon the conversation he had overheard upon the pier, and laying particular stress upon the misery she had spoken to him of in that scene upon the cliff.

Burrell heard him out with the utmost patience, and then asked him whether he was quite sure that the girl had made up her mind to commit suicide.

"You see, sir," he continued, "it's like this —so many of those professional ladies work themselves up to such a pitch that they make believe to be prepared to do anything. When, however, it comes to actually performing it, they as often as not draw back. Do you think she knew that you were following her?"

"I am quite certain she did not," George replied indignantly. "It was some distance behind her, the night was a wild one, and the noise of the waves beating against the Esplanade would have completely drowned the

sound of my steps. I could scarcely keep her figure in view, but I am quite certain that she did not once turn round."

"And you think, then, that she was fully determined to throw herself over the cliffs?"

"I am sure of it," the other answered. "If I had not caught her when I did, it would have been too late. The way in which she broke down when I carried her to the shelter proved to me conclusively that she was in deadly earnest. If I had let her go, I firmly believe she would have made a second attempt."

"Instead of which you reasoned with her and comforted her, and then escorted her to her residence?"

"That is so."

"And before you left her, I understand that she gave you her promise that she would not attempt again what you had saved her from?"

"She did. And I feel sure that she intended to keep her promise at the moment of making it. It might have been what she saw when she got inside the——"

"If you'll excuse me, sir, we'll come to that directly," the detective interrupted. "I want to get the whole story fixed in my mind as we go along. And what happened then?"

"She left me and went into the house."

"Did you actually see her enter?"

"No; I walked back towards the Esplanade as soon as I had wished her good night."

"Did you see or pass any one in the street?"

"No; not any one."

"You are sure of that, I suppose?"

"Quite sure."

Burrell took an enormous note-book from his pocket, and made some entries in it. While he was so doing, he looked more like a farmer than ever. Having read over what he had written, he replaced the book in his pocket.

"Being a performer in public, her photograph would most probably be for sale," he continued.

"I have not seen one," George replied. "At any rate, I have not come across it down here."

"You did not happen to see any one else in her company, I suppose?"

George answered in the negative, and then, after putting a few more questions to him, Burrell rose to leave.

"I shall be staying at the hotel where the Inquest was held to-day," he said. "If you should have any news or anything else to tell me, that address will find me."

He thereupon took his departure.

Throughout the day following they saw nothing of him. George, however, called at the police-station, and was informed by the officer in charge that they had received no information concerning the whereabouts of the missing woman. The shore for many miles had been most carefully searched, but without

success. Had she carried out her first intention and thrown herself over, her body must have been found, for the reason that the tide did not actually come up to the base of the cliffs for something like two miles from the town. She would scarcely have been likely, so the police argued, to have walked so far before committing the act. Inquiries had been made in the various villages in the neighborhood, but without hearing anything of her. She had not left the town by train, nor had she been heard of at her London address.

"What on earth can have become of her!" George asked himself for the hundredth time; and for the hundredth time could only answer with a shake of the head and a heavy sigh.

On the day following, the adjourned Inquest was held, and Mildmay and George attended it. As before, the large room at the Queen's Head Hotel was crowded to suffocating point. The case had excited an extraordinary interest throughout the country, and Pressmen from all parts of England were present to report on it. The Coroner having opened his court, recalled the witness who had heard the pair quarrelling in the green room of the Pavilion. He repeated his evidence with as much satisfaction to himself as he had done on the previous occasion. When he had returned to his seat, Edward Bucknor was called, and a tall,

stout man, of the butler type, stepped promptly forward. He deposed that he lived in George Street, Westminster, where he kept a boarding-house. He had known Herr Paulus Gravbowski and Madame Cardew for some years. They had rooms in his house, and stayed there whenever they were in London. The deceased, he said, was of very violent temper, and, in his opinion, Madame Cardew was very far from happy with him. He had never heard her utter any threat against him. He did not think it was in her nature to do so. She was an extremely quiet and reserved lady, but was the possessor of a strong will, and, in the witness's opinion, the old gentleman knew exactly how far he could go with her. He had neither seen nor heard of Madame Cardew since she left his house on the Tuesday before the murder. Many of her belongings were still with him, in the room she usually occupied, and he was present when the police searched the trunks and boxes. As the latter witness finished his evidence, George looked across the room, and saw, seated in the further corner, the bulky form of Mr. Burrell, who, with his hands upon his knees, was listening to the evidence with rapt attention. An officer of the local police was next called, who stated that a most thorough search had been made of the neighborhood, but not so much as a trace of the missing woman

had been discovered. When he retired, Emanuel Timms was called. He proved to be a dapper little man, overflowing with a sense of his own importance. He stated that he was an ironmonger and gunsmith by trade, and was a member of the Town Council. In that capacity he formed one of the Committee who were responsible for the conduct of the Pavilion on the pier. As a rule he did not patronize such entertainments, but now and again he made a point of looking in upon the performance in order to judge of the manner in which they were conducted. The last time that he did so was on the occasion of the first performance given by Madame Cardew and the murdered man. He remembered being struck by the beauty of the lady, and was quite sure he should have known her again anywhere. On the morning following that performance she entered his shop and inquired whether he sold revolvers. When he replied that he did, she asked to be allowed to inspect some, and upon his placing a number before her, she chose one, remarking that she would take it away with her.

"Did it not strike you as being rather strange that a young lady should purchase such a weapon?" the Coroner asked.

"I will admit that it did," Mr. Timms replied. "But it would not pay me to question

my customers as to their reasons for buying things out of my shop."

One of the jurymen then asked if cartridges had been purchased at the same time, to which Mr. Timms replied that he had sold her a box of a hundred to fit that special weapon.

"Did she give any reason for requiring it?" another juryman inquired.

"None whatever."

James Williams, a shopman in the employ of the last witness, gave corroborative evidence, after which the detective who had made an examination of Madame Cardew's belongings was recalled. Asked if he had discovered such a weapon among her effects, he replied in the negative. He was quite sure that neither the revolver nor the cartridges were in the trunk, or, so far as he could see, at No. 13, Beach Street, at all.

Seated near George was a tall, showily dressed man of about fifty. When the name of Augustus Montgommery was called, he rose and approached the table. Having been sworn, he stated that he was the Manager of the Winter Gardens at Bexcliffe-on-Sea, and that the deceased and Madame Cardew had visited that town a month before, and been engaged by him. Gravbowski's treatment of the lady was the subject of much comment among the staff of their concert-room. On one occasion Grav-

bowski had struck her with the bow of her violin, and had broken it, necessitating his sending out for another before the performance could commence. He had remonstrated strongly with the old man, who at such moments seemed to have no control over himself. Madame Cardew was well-nigh hysterical at the time. "Some day he will drive me to despair," she had cried, "and then I do not know what I shall do to him."

The Coroner thereupon asked the witness if he was quite certain that those were the words he had heard her use. The man replied that he was. He was very interested in Madame Cardew, and what Gravbowski had said to her on that occasion was indelibly fixed in his memory.

When this witness had in his turn sat down, the Jury retired to an adjoining room to consider their verdict. They were absent for about a quarter of an hour, and when they returned, in reply to the usual questions, their Foreman stated that their verdict was one of "Wilful Murder" against Madame Cecilia Cardew.

George's heart sank within him. He followed Mildmay out of the room, and when they were in the passage, waited with him, in silence, for Burrell to join them.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Kilvert," said the latter, as he came up; then he continued mop-

ping his forehead with his handkerchief. "It's very warm in that room—very warm indeed. If there's one thing more than another that upsets me, it's a close Court."

Talking in this way, he led them into the street, and it was only when they were well out of ear-shot of the crowd that had collected before the hotel that George inquired whether he had any news for him.

"Nothing yet," Burrell replied, shaking his head. "To tell you the truth, this is about as strange a case as ever I had to deal with. One thing, however, is quite certain, and that is that the police don't know any more than we do. The Coroner's jury can return a verdict of 'Wilful Murder' against the lady, but even if they catch her, they'll never be able to prove it. Her quarrel with Gravbowski the other night, and the evidence given by that man from Bexcliffe, proved that she had once stated that it was within the bounds of possibility that, at some time or another, if he drove her too far, she might do him a mischief. But she was hysterical when she said that, and very probably meant nothing by it. The worst part of the whole business is the fact of her running away. If she had stayed here, and told the police that she had come back with you, and on entering their sitting-room had found Gravbowski lying dead upon the floor, they might

have been as suspicious as they pleased, but they couldn't have committed her. No judge or jury would convict on such evidence."

Unhappily there was no denying the fact that Burrell was right.

"You think, then, that she has run away?" George asked.

"I'm certain of it," the detective replied. "At first I thought she have thrown herself over the cliffs, as she wanted to do before, but I've abandoned that notion entirely."

He could not be induced to say why he had done so, however, nor would he hazard any opinion as to the probable issue of the case.

"If you'd seen as much of this sort of thing as I have, sir," he said, "you would be able to appreciate my position. I could cite you a dozen cases, at least, where the end looked as plain as a pike-staff at the beginning. Yet every one of those cases ended in a diametrically different fashion. As a matter of fact, I often feel inclined, when I am taking up a bit of business like this, to put the blame upon the most unlikely person in the case. I've known it come out right."

"Unhappily there seems to be only one person concerned in this case," said George, gloomily. "Poor girl, if she's alive, she must be suffering agonies of fear."

"She's alive, right enough, sir," said Bur-

rell, confidently; "and, all being well, we'll prove her innocent in the end."

"Do that, and you'll have my gratitude for life," George replied. "Ask what you will of me then."

"It's very kind of you to say so," Burrell replied. "You may be sure I shall do my best, if only for my own satisfaction."

At the corner of the street leading to their hotel they separated, Burrell, as usual, promising to communicate with them the moment he had anything of importance to tell.

"I like the man," said George to Mildmay, when they had resumed their walk.

"He certainly inspires a feeling of confidence in one," the other replied. "Let us hope that he will be as successful in this case as he seems to have been in others."

"He must be," George answered. "I shall never rest until I have found her and proclaimed her innocence to the world. Good Heavens, man!" he continued, "is there any one living could look into her face and believe her guilty of such a diabolical crime? Her life with that man must have been a hell upon earth! It's no wonder she tried to end it!"

That evening after dinner the two men went for a stroll upon the Esplanade. George did not feel equal to visiting the club, and near the pier he would not go. They were absent for up-

wards of an hour, and on their return they were informed by the hall-porter that a gentleman of the name of Burrell had called half an hour before to see Mr. Kilvert.

"Bother it!" said George, irritably, "I would not have missed him for the world. He must have something important to tell us, or he would not have called at such an hour."

"He told me to say that he would be back in half an hour, sir," the servant continued.

There was nothing for it, therefore, but to wait with all the patience they could command for his return. When thirty-five minutes had elapsed, and still the detective had not put in an appearance, George's temper gave way altogether.

"He might at least make it convenient to keep his appointments," he said. "He knows very well how anxious I am and what misery this delay is causing me."

"He won't be long now, my dear fellow," said Mildmay, soothingly; and the words had scarcely left his lips before the door opened, and Burrell was ushered into the room.

"Good evening, gentlemen," he said, placing his hat upon a chair. "I looked in about half an hour or so ago to see if I could have a few words with you, but the man in the hall told me you were out."

"We went for a stroll on the Esplanade,"

George replied. "I hope you have good news for me, Mr. Burrell?"

"That all depends how you take it, sir," Burrell answered. "I've got some news, and somehow I think you'll appreciate it. I only dropped across it at about half-past six; still, I thought I would let you hear it to-night."

"Of course, of course," cried George. "But the news! Can you prove beyond doubt that Madame Cardew did not commit the crime, or have you discovered her whereabouts?"

"Her whereabouts is still a mystery," the other replied. "But so far as the crime is concerned, I think I can safely say that, even if she had any connection with it at all, she is not the actual murderess."

"How did you find that out?" put in Mildmay. "I know you must have discovered something, for your experience is too great to allow of your putting forward such a statement haphazard."

"Well, gentlemen, I'll tell you all I've learnt, and then you can judge for yourselves. When I left you this afternoon, I went back to my quarters, and sat myself down to my stamp album."

"Good gracious, man, what has a stamp album to do with Madame Cardew?" asked George, in a fever of impatience.

"Everything," said Burrell. "Some day, if

you will allow me, I will show you my collection. It's a pretty decent one, I can assure you, and will repay inspection. Well, sir, as I was going to say, when I want to think out a bit of business, I get out my album, and run my eye through it. It seems to help me to concentrate my attention, you see. Perhaps it's the magnifying-glass that does it."

George could contain himself no longer. "If you want to drive me mad, Burrell," he cried, "I assure you you're going the right way to work to do it. Why on earth don't you get on with your story?"

But the imperturbable Burrell was not to be hurried. He knew the value of what he had to say, and he was going to tell it in his own fashion.

"Well, sir," he continued, "as I was saying, down I sat to my stamps. And it was while I was looking at a certain '51 Canadian, that cost me a large amount of trouble, that an idea occurred to me. Up I jumped, put on my hat, and set off for the scene of the murder. I'd already made friends with the landlady, so she let me go into the room alone. I didn't want her hanging around watching me, you see, telling the professionals what I discovered—if I found anything, that is to say. But before I let her go, I asked her if the old man had received any letters while he was in her house.

Not one, she told me. This was disappointing, but it couldn't be helped. So into the room I went and shut the door. Now, as doubtless you have observed, there have been lots of theories put forward in this case. Remember that the old man was stabbed from behind. This would argue, would it not, that he was taken unawares? Death must have been instantaneous, or almost so; and the position in which the body lay, when found, and the fact that nothing else in the room was disturbed, even the tablecloth was not disarranged, must necessarily point to where he was standing when whoever committed the crime stole up to him. The nature of the wound and the doctor's evidence tells us that the weapon was a double-edged one, the blade being at least an inch wide. It was also sharp as a razor, and could not have been less than eight inches long. In conclusion, let us remember the fact that it is missing. Now you have a fine bundle of facts before you to work upon. What do you make of them, gentlemen?"

His audience shook their heads.

"I can make neither head nor tail of them," said George; "nor do I see how the recital of such matters can help us."

"Well, sir, in the first place, doesn't it seem most unlikely to you that a lady, such as Madame Cardew is represented to be, however

much she might hate a man, would creep up behind him and stab him in the back?"

"It seems not only unlikely, but quite impossible," George replied.

"Then again, sir, we have the evidence of that ironmonger, Timms, that Madame Cardew purchased a revolver and cartridges from him. Now, the revolver was not found amongst her effects, which might possibly mean that she was in the habit, for some reason of her own, of carrying it about with her. If this had been so she would surely have been more likely to have shot him rather than to have stabbed him. One more point, and then I will come to my discovery. Pardon me, sir, if I presume, for the sake of argument, that she *did* commit the crime. Very good! Now, gentlemen, recall the circumstances that she was playing the violin at the Pavilion on the night of the murder. She wore a close-fitting black satin dress. The bodice was cut low, and the sleeves extended to only a few inches below the shoulder. I believe I am right?"

"You are quite right," said George, who was beginning to show signs of excitement. "Go on!"

"Well, sir, it's a regular man's joke that a woman's pocket is difficult to find, and that half her time she does not know where it is herself. You, Mr. Kilvert, say you saw Ma-

dame Cardew ascend the steps of the house; the room in which the murder was committed overlooks those steps, and the door to it is only a few paces along the passage. At the time, she was wearing a heavy cloak. Now, it is quite certain that if she left that cloak in the passage, Gravbowski would have heard her come in, and would probably have been prepared for her. If she did not take it off, but wore it when she went into the room, do you mean to tell me that she could have come up to him and have clutched him, a strong man, remember, though old, with one hand, by the throat, while she stabbed him by the other, her shoulders at the time being comparatively pinioned by her cloak? No, gentlemen! For my part, I say it is not possible!"

He looked from one to the other as if to ascertain what their thoughts were.

"But, after all, my good Burrell, this is only inductive reasoning on your part," said Mildmay, quietly. "You must have some other fact up your sleeve, which you have not mentioned yet, or you would not tell us all this."

"I have, sir," replied Burrell, "and you shall hear it. After I had taken a rough survey of the room, just to fix its general outline in my mind, so to speak, I made a closer inspection of it. I examined the carpet, out of which, by the way, the old woman will never be able to get

the stains of blood; I turned the tablecloth inside out, and overlooked every inch of it. 'Whoever committed this murder,' I said to myself, 'must have been possessed of a cool and collected temperament.' Care was taken that the old man should make no noise, and also that no record should be left as to the identity of the assassin. A highly sensitive and overwrought young lady, who scarcely more than an hour before had tried to take her own life, would not have carried out her plans so perfectly. She would assuredly have left something to incriminate herself. My experience is that in a crime of this description the most difficult thing to avoid is the stain of blood. A spot on the clothes is almost certain to be seen by somebody, and, what is more, will be remembered and brought up as evidence sooner or later. You can't plunge a knife into a man's body and hide it about your person afterwards, without having wiped it somewhere, or on something. What I wanted to discover was where this man or woman, as the case may be, wiped it. Not on his handkerchief or on his clothes, you may be sure of that."

"And you have found out where it was wiped?" asked George, eagerly.

"I have, sir," said Burrell, proudly. "The knife, dagger, stiletto, or whatever you may please to call it, was wiped on the underside of

the hearthrug, and if you can tell me that the young lady did that, well, all that I can say is that you're a better judge of character than I am."

"But, with all this, how do you account for the absence of the young lady herself?" asked Mildmay.

The detective had to admit that he could not account for it.

"The only theory I can give is that she must have come in while they were at work, and in order that she should not give the alarm and bear witness against them, they carried her off."

"That's exactly what I said at the first Inquest," said George, "but I fancy the idea was ridiculed by the police as impossible."

Burrell sniffed scornfully. "We shall see in the end who is right," he said.

"And now what do you propose doing?" inquired George.

"To-morrow morning," said Burrell, "I shall return to London and commence my inquiries there. Should you desire to see me this is my address."

He placed a card upon the table, and then rose to bid them "Good night." George escorted him down to the hall, and then returned to Mildmay.

"What do you think now?" he asked of that quiet but astute gentleman.

"I think as I did before, that there is no doubt as to her innocence," the other replied. "I fancy, however, it will take some time to prove it."

"If it takes me all my life, I will do so," George returned; and then to himself he added, "And when I've done it, surely she will be grateful!"

CHAPTER VI.

On the day following the interview described at the end of the previous chapter, George Kilvert and Mildmay shook the dust of Beachcombe from their feet and returned to London. They had only been absent a few days, yet to one of them at least it seemed an Eternity. In that short space of time George felt as if his whole life had been changed for him. He had left London a happy-go-lucky young fellow, rich beyond the dreams of avarice, with nothing to trouble him save the mere trifles of the moment. He was returning, staggering beneath the weight of a sorrow, such as falls to the lot of but few young men to know. He had learnt almost in a moment to love deeply, only to lose the object of his love well-nigh as quickly as he had found her. He was pinning his chance of happiness on the honor of one whom the world believed capable of committing an atrocious crime, he was championing her cause against the Majesty of the Law of England, and pitting his wits against the most clever criminal hunters in the realm. Under these circum-

stances he might well feel, as the express sped through the sunny Sussex country, that the world was not so joyous a place as he had aforetimes deemed it. When he reached Victoria it was just one o'clock.

"We won't part company yet," said George. "Edwards can look after our bags, and we will go on to the club for lunch. We've only been away for a few days, yet I feel like Rip van Winkle."

"There may possibly be one or two in our village who may remember us," answered Mildmay, in a corresponding humor.

It would seem that his words were correct, for as they drove through the busy streets, George recognized, and was recognized by, many old friends. Tall, handsome, enormously rich, she would have been a strange young woman who would have found it in her heart to be unkind to him.

At last they reached Clubland, and the cab drew up before the portals of the particular *caravanserai* they had selected for their luncheon.

"Rip van Winkle has reached his old home at last," said Mildmay. "Now let's see who there is amongst the companions of his youth that will remember him."

They passed into the dining-room together, and looked about them.

"Hulloa, Kilvert, old fellow," said a tall

youth with a vacuous expression, in which a large eye-glass played a conspicuous part, "haven't seen you for weeks. Where on earth have you been hiding yourself?"

"At the other end of the world," George replied—"that is to say, on the Sussex coast. Mildmay and I have been disporting ourselves on the verge of the Briny, and now we have come back to London for lunch."

"The very thing," the young man replied. "I breakfasted myself only an hour ago, but I fancy I can manage the wing of a chicken just to keep you company." Then, indicating Mildmay, he continued, "What have you been doing to our little friend here, George? The sea-air seems to have made him more than usually quiet."

"It is better policy to hold one's tongue," said Mildmay, "when it's impossible to get a word in edgeways. The gift of loquacity must have been given you in compensation for those more conspicuous talents which Nature found herself unable to bestow."

"Egad! that's a nasty one," returned the other, with perfect equanimity. "However, I bear you no malice. There's a good table in the window going begging, so we had better secure it."

They followed him to the table in question, and took their places at it. George by no

means regretted the presence of this feather-brained young fellow; his flippant chatter took him out of himself for the time being. Mildmay noticed this, and, during the progress of the meal, engaged himself in a succession of verbal sparring matches with the youth.

"'Gad! I was forgetting," the youngster went on—"apart from everything else. You're no end of a celebrity just now, Kilvert."

George looked at him suspiciously.

"I don't understand why it should be apart from everything else," he replied. "Nevertheless, I am grateful to a hitherto neglectful country for condescending to admit that I have any merits at all. What have I done now that is more than usually brilliant?"

"Posing as the champion of females in distress," said the other, quite unaware of the pit he was digging for himself. "We read all about it in the papers yesterday. One of the evening halfpennies, I forget which, had your portrait, and described you as a 'millionaire with a more than a usual share of good looks.' How do you like that, my boy? If you are not jolly careful Madame Tussaud will be after you. Exhibit No. 530: Type of a Hero of Modern Romance!"

Mildmay saw a look flash into George's eye that was like the lightning that precedes a rising storm.

"Exhibit No. 531," he put in quickly: "Purveyor of Inane Gossip."

As he said it, he administered such a sharp kick under the table that the young gentleman uttered an exclamation of surprise and pain.

George had put down his knife and fork, and was sitting back in his chair.

"And, since you are so well informed, perhaps you'll tell me what our mutual friends say about it all?" he began, regarding the young man opposite him with angry eyes.

"Oh, they're saying all sorts of things," the young man answered, quite oblivious to Mildmay's warning. "Some of them believe you followed the girl down to Beachcombe. In fact one old duffer told me that he knew for a fact that you were married to her two or three weeks ago. Most people think you know where she is now."

"Then you can tell all your friends that they lie," George retorted hotly. "Good Heavens! what a wretched world this is, when a man can't save a girl's life without having all sorts of uncharitable insinuations thrown out to his and her discredit!"

"That's exactly what I said," the youth replied, leaning back in his chair. "Look at poor old Jimmy Delamont's case. He went down last winter to shoot at his brother's place in

Hampshire. When he got to Waterloo, he found that he had only just time to catch his train. Standing on the platform was old Foxey Wildgrave, staring about him as if he did not know where he was. 'Hulloa, Jimmy,' he shouts out, taking hold of the other's arm, 'where are you going?' Not having time to stop and talk to him, Jimmy shook him off, saying as he did so, 'Going down to shoot at my brother's.' Now, you know, Foxey is a bit deaf. He saw that Jimmy was hot and excited, so off he goes, and puts the story about that Jimmy had shot his brother—*by accident, of course.* The consequences were that when Jimmy returned to town, he found that the story had been enlarged upon, and that there were lots of people who fought shy of him. Didn't he just kick up a fuss when he found out that he was supposed to have gone off his head. He and old Foxey don't speak to this day."

"And I don't wonder at it," said George, whose ruffled plumes were beginning to settle down. "But look here, my young man, if you value my friendship, don't you start playing Foxey Wildgrave with my affairs."

"Good Gad!" returned the other, "you surely don't think I would do such a thing. If there's one thing in the world I hate it is the man who goes in for scandal."

"I gathered as much from what you said just now," Mildmay replied quietly.

"And you barked my leg to prove it, I suppose?" retorted the other, with an injured air. "You've a fine taste in humor, old man; but the toes of your boots are confoundedly sharp."

Presently they parted company, and George and Mildmay went off to the smoking-room.

"I owe you one for that kick, old man," said George. "It was kindly meant."

"I wish it could have been harder," Mildmay replied. "It would have been had Nature not been so chary when she served me out my legs."

They chatted for half an hour or so, and then bade each other good-by.

"Remember, old man," said Mildmay, as they shook hands, "I don't want you to let me drop out of this matter. If I can help you in any sort of way, you know how gladly I will do so."

"I am quite sure of that," George replied, "and I thank you for it. But I don't see what you can do until I hear from Burrell. As soon as I do, I'll communicate with you. You've been awfully good to me, and I don't know how to thank you."

"Don't try to, then," said the little fellow. "Bless your heart, it's made a new man of me. I can only hope and trust that it may all come

out right in the end. You mustn't lose heart, you know. Nothing's to be gained by knuckling under."

"I shall not do that, you may be sure," George replied. "And now good-by."

"And good luck."

When George left the club he drove back to his own abode. His eminently respectable butler opened the door to him as if he had not been away, took his hat and coat, and informed him as to the business and names of certain people who had called to see him during his absence. Passing into his study, he found a heap of letters on the table awaiting his attention. A large proportion of them were invitations, and these he put away with a sigh. It seemed like mockery to ask him to enjoy himself when the woman he loved was being hunted by the police on a charge of murder. He had almost reached the end of his correspondence when he came upon an envelope, the handwriting upon which was unfamiliar to him. He opened it without interest. As he glanced at the writing on the sheet of notepaper he withdrew from the envelope, however, he uttered an exclamation of astonishment. Could he believe his eyes, or was it a dream? It consisted of only four lines, and they were as follows:

"I gave you my promise that if I were in

trouble I would communicate with you. You saved my life, but it is a pity that you did not let me die. Every one will believe me guilty, but I swear to you by all I hold sacred that I am innocent. God help me!"

That was all!

For some time after he had read it, George stood with the letter in his hand. His surprise was so great that at first he was unable to realize that he was the recipient of a message from the woman he loved. When he recovered his self-possession, however, he was able in a degree to understand what the communication meant to him. It proved one thing at least beyond the shadow of a doubt, and this was the fact that she was still alive. With his heart beating like a sledge hammer in his breast, he seated himself in a chair, and once more glued his eyes on the small sheet of paper. The writing was delicate and womanly, but it showed undoubted signs of having been penned in haste. What need was there for her to tell him that she was innocent? He had known it from the first. He would have staked his life upon it. But where had the letter been written, and how had she arranged that it should reach him? Springing out of his chair, he hastened to the table where he had opened it. There was a postmark in addition to the London stamp, but it was well-nigh indecipherable. The name of

the place, whatever it was, ended in E, so much was certain; B was undoubtedly the fourth letter, but what the rest might be, though he tried hard to make it out, he was unable to discover.

"Never mind," he said to himself, with a cheerfulness he had not felt for a long time, "I'll find out if I have to go to every village and town in England to do so."

His first thought was to take it to the postal authorities, but a moment's reflection showed him the folly of this. His association with the case by this time was so well known throughout the country, and gossip was so busy linking his name with that of the missing woman, that to have shown any sort of anxiety to have traced a letter, the handwriting of which must of necessity be exhibited, would in all possible probability result in putting the police upon her track.

"I must see Burrell about it at once," he said, "and endeavor to find out what he thinks about it."

So saying, he rang the bell and bade the servant procure him a cab.

"Let's hope I shall have the good luck to find him at home," he said.

Having made sure of Burrell's address, he descended to the street, sprang into the cab he found waiting for him there, and bade the man

drive him with all speed to Francis Street, Covent Garden. The precious letter and the envelope, which was equally valuable, were safely stowed away in his pocket ready for the other's inspection.

In something under ten minutes after leaving the flat the cab turned into Francis Street, and presently drew up before the house in which Burrell had his rooms. It was a noisy, bustling thoroughfare, and not at all the sort of place George imagined such a man would have chosen for his abode. The ground floor was the head-quarters of some Charitable Association, if one might judge by the inscriptions upon the windows. Entering, George ascended to the first floor. Observing that this consisted of offices, he climbed to the next, to discover a woman busily engaged in scrubbing the lino-leum-covered landing.

"Perhaps you can tell me," he said, "where I can find Mr. Jacob Burrell?"

"Shure, if it's Mr. Burrell ye want, he's not at home," the woman replied. "He went out a while since."

George was bitterly disappointed. He had counted so much on finding Burrell at home. A moment's reflection, however, should have shown him that it was scarcely probable that such a busy man would be indoors at that hour of the day.

"When do you expect him back?" he inquired. "He surely left some message."

The woman only shook her head.

"There's no saying when he will be back," she answered, without sympathy for the other's distress. "It may be an hour he'll be away, or maybe he'll not be back until to-morrow. If ye'll give me yer name, I'll tell him ye've called. That's the most I can do."

"But I want to see him myself," George replied. "My business is most important. If I do not see him at once it may be too late."

"'Twill be himself 'll be very sorry to have missed ye, then," she continued, her manner completely changed by the half-crown George had slipped into her hand. "He's such a man for business is Mr. Burrell. Perhaps your honor would be afther liking to write him a letter?"

"If I can't see him it might be as well to do that," George answered.

"Then be so good as to come to his room, sir," said the woman, rising to her feet and conducting him to a door at the end of the passage. "This is his sitting-room, and I can find ye pens and paper afore ye'll be able to look round."

As she said this, she unlocked the door, and led the way into a fair-sized room overlooking the street. As George entered it, he looked about

him with some measure of curiosity. What he had expected to see I cannot say—the fact, however, remains that, in a degree, the character of the room surprised him. Not a trace of the owner's profession was to be discovered in it. A handsome oak bookcase, well filled, stood on one side, while a massive sideboard of the same valuable wood balanced it on the other. Several good engravings hung upon the walls, two very comfortable armchairs stood upon either side of the fireplace, while half a dozen of a smaller size were ranged against the walls, with a canary cage in the window to complete the arrangement. There was also a large and important-looking writing-desk near the fireplace. The woman, having procured him the necessary writing materials, invited him to be seated at the table. The letter did not take long to pen. In it he asked Burrell, should he chance to return and find the note before six o'clock, not to go out again until he had seen him. This was emphasized by the suggestive sentence, "*The information I have to give you is of a most important nature.*"

"If I leave this upon the table, I suppose he will see it?" George asked of the woman.

"He'll find it directly he comes in," she answered. "Trust him for that."

"Very well," George went on. "I will return in an hour to see if he is back."

Then, leaving his letter lying upon the table, he descended to the street below. To wile away the time, he walked through the market, then round by Charing Cross and Trafalgar Square, and so slowly back by way of Long Acre to Francis Street.

"Let us hope I shall have the good luck to find him at home this time," he said to himself, as he mounted the stairs to Burrell's quarters.

There was no sign of the woman to be discovered on this occasion, and, to George's dismay, the detective's door was still locked. He was in the act of wondering what he should do, when the sound of a heavy footfall upon the stairs below reached him, and a moment later Burrell's stalwart figure was to be seen ascending.

"Ah, good afternoon, Mr. Kilvert," the latter exclaimed, as he caught sight of him. "So you've found your way to my abode. I hope you have not been waiting long."

"This is the second visit I've paid," said George. "I was here an hour ago, but a woman I saw told me that you were not at home."

"I have been very busy," said Burrell, "and have only a short time to spare now. But don't let me keep you standing here. Come into my sitting-room."

As he said this, he unlocked the door at

the end of the passage, and invited George to enter.

"This is my note," said the latter picking up the letter he had written as he spoke. "I left it for you in case you should return before I did. It may as well be destroyed now. I have come to see you on most important business; in fact, I have made a great discovery, Mr. Burrell."

"Indeed! I suppose it concerns the case? If so, pray let me hear it. Won't you sit down?"

As he spoke, he wheeled a chair forward for his guest's accommodation.

"I have received a communication from Madame Cardew," said George. "When I reached home I found this awaiting me."

So saying, he took from his pocket the letter and envelope in question, and handed them to Burrell, who read the former carefully, and then consulted the latter, after which he produced his magnifying-glass. With its assistance he closely examined the postmark.

"This would seem to bear out my contention that our first theory was a right one," he remarked, looking up at George, who had risen from his chair and was standing at the fireplace. "Whoever committed the murder has abducted her, I should say, in order that she should not be in a position to give evidence against him.

It is plain that this message was hurriedly written, but the question is, Why was she permitted to post it? That is a point which will take some explaining."

"Let's hope that some day we shall be in a position to do so," George replied. "What do you think is the best thing to be done about it?"

"To begin with, we must find the place named on the postmark of this envelope," said Burrell. "It's a pity it isn't a little plainer. I'll just look at the Post-Office Guide, and see if it can tell us anything."

He crossed to the bookshelf, and took from it the latest copy of the work in question.

"The last letter is certainly an E," said George, "and the fourth a B, if I'm not mistaken."

"Fourth letter B, last letter E," Burrell muttered to himself, "and all these columns to be searched. Why, it's like looking for a needle in a bundle of straw. We shall be hours finding it."

"It's a pity we haven't another book, in which case I could help you," George remarked.

"That's very easily arranged," the detective answered; and, picking up the book, he tore it in half, handing one part to George, keeping the other himself.

For the next quarter of an hour silence

reigned in the room. Each man was busily marking his copy. George was the first to stop.

"I think that's the last," said Burrell, pushing his share of the book from him. "Now, sir, let us pool our numbers, and endeavor to ascertain the result."

Taking a sheet of notepaper from the rack, he wrote upon it the names of the various places he had selected, and to them added those George had found. A number were Irish, and these were discarded at once. Those of Scotland and Wales followed next.

"How many towns and villages does that leave?" George inquired, when the weeding-out process was well advanced.

"I'll tell you," Burrell answered. "To begin with, we have Metborne, Camborne, Bembridge, Hilburne, Wimborne, Ashborne, and Melbourne. Now, we must remember that the murder took place in Sussex. I see from the London postmark on the back of the envelope that the letter was received in Town on the evening of the day that the crime was discovered. This would naturally lead one to suppose that Madame Cardew could not have been a great distance from London when she posted it. Now, Metborne is not very far from Market Harboro'. The first train in the morning by which she could possibly have traveled to the

latter place did not leave Beachcombe until half-past six, so that she could not have posted a letter there in time for it to have reached London that night. The same argument applies to Camborne in Cornwall, and Ashborne and Melbourne in Derbyshire. Bembridge, in the Isle of Wight, is out of the question, and we might also say the same for Wimborne. Hilburne is the only place that remains, and where that is I haven't the slightest notion."

Going to the bookcase again, he drew forth a book, which he consulted.

"Ah," he said, "I have it at last! We are nearer the mark than we imagined."

"Where is the place?" George inquired.

Burrell ran his finger down the column. "Hilburne, Sussex, Map, 24, G—E."

He immediately turned to the map in question, and, after a short study of it, placed the point of his pencil upon a small dot.

"Now we'll see how far it is from Beachcombe," he remarked.

Taking a pair of dividers, he consulted the scale at the foot of the page, and then compared it with the map.

"Roughly speaking," he continued, "it is about twenty-five miles. If they drove, and had a good horse, they might have been there by four o'clock, or at latest five. In other

words say five hours after the murder was committed."

"You say *they!* What makes you think there is any one else concerned in it?"

"I am convinced of it," said Burrell. "And I fancy that time will prove that I am correct. It is scarcely probable that Madame Cardew would find a conveyance and drive herself, while it would have been impossible for her to have walked the distance in the time. The question is:—Where did she get this paper and envelope? It is cheap and common. A beautiful and refined woman would have nothing to do with such stuff."

Then he held the paper in question to the light, and after that turned it quickly over.

"It seems as if somebody else has commenced a letter on it," he said at last. "Here are the first two words of one carefully blotted out."

He took it, with his magnifying-glass, to the window, where he pored over it.

"It's almost as bad as the postmark," he said. "The first word is 'Darling'—that's plain enough. The second is a short one, and, if I'm not mistaken, begins with a G."

George suggested his own name, but Burrell rejected it as being too long for the space covered.

"I'd take my affidavit that it consists of only three letters," he said. "Now, what name is

there, or what abbreviation of a name, that begins with G, and is so short?"

They puzzled their brains for some time, but without any gratifying result.

"Let's go through the alphabet," said George. "If we try every letter we may happen to hit upon the word."

"A good idea," Burrell returned. "Call them out, sir, if you will, and we'll see what we can do."

They thereupon commenced. It was not, however, until they were nearing the end that the mystery was solved.

"I have it," cried George. "It's Gus!"

Burrell held the paper to the light again. "You're right, sir—that's what it is. It's 'Darling Gus.'"

"Now no man would use that form of endearment to another," said George, "so it's certain that that letter must have emanated from a woman—I should say an uneducated one too."

"To-morrow morning I'll take a run down to Hilburne," said Burrell, "and look about the place. This bit of information may lead to something important."

"I suppose it would not be possible for you to allow me to accompany you?" asked George, anxiously. "I would try not to be in your way, and I'm so anxious that I doubt if I could remain here in idleness."

"Come with me by all manner of means," the detective answered, "but not as Mr. Kilvert, if you please. If they were to discover your identity, it would be good-by to any hope we might have of laying them by the heels."

"In that case, who am I to be?" asked George, with a smile. "You can make me what you like."

"I've got it, sir. We're two Australians, enjoying a trip to the old Country, and on the look out for prize-bred stock to take back with us. You are the owner of some large Station properties, and I am your manager. How'd it be, sir, to send a dog-cart on ahead, and let it meet us at some station down the line? Then we could drive along, and put up at Hilburne just as pleasant as could be. There's a lot of information to be picked up at a village inn, if you go the right way to work to look for it."

"Your idea should work well," George replied. "If you'll arrange a station, I'll make it my business to see that a dog-cart is there in time."

"No groom, sir, if you please. The best of them are apt to talk, and that's not at all what we want."

"I'll see to that," George answered. "And now, what station will you choose?"

Once more Burrell consulted his map, after which a Bradshaw was requisitioned.

"The station for us will be Marley, ten miles from Hilburne," said Burrell. There's a train that leaves Victoria at 10.40, which would get us down there at 11.25. We should then reach Hilburne by about half-past twelve. Just in time for lunch, in fact. After that we could get to work."

"Very well. I will see that the horse and cart are sent off to-night, and will meet you at Victoria at 10.30 to-morrow morning. And now, will you tell me what you have discovered?"

"Well, sir, it's not quite so important as yours, I'll admit, but it's useful, nevertheless. The first thing to be ascertained in a case like this is the motive for the crime. If Madame Cardew committed it——"

"Which she certainly did not," George put in hurriedly.

"Well, forgive me if, for the moment, we suppose that she did, sir," the detective replied. "In that case, what could her reason have been?"

"It might have been done, if such a thing were possible, in a fit of momentary rage."

"No, sir; as I have said before, you must remember that he was stabbed from behind, and, at the same time, held by the throat to prevent his calling out. That doesn't look like a fit of *momentary rage*, does it? No! there

was some other reason to account for it. My discovery is another step towards doing so. I have found out that Gravbowski was not the murdered man's real name."

"Very likely not. He was a professional musician, and they, like actors, as often as not, perform under a *nom de théâtre*."

"In Gravbowski's case I have my suspicions that the change was effected for another purpose," Burrell replied. "I have learnt that when he first came to England from Poland, he lived in a house in the Camden Road, and also that for some time after his arrival he scarcely ever went outside the door, except at night. The landlord of the house is dead, unfortunately, but I have seen his widow, and she describes Gravbowski as being like a man haunted by a continual fear. He never dropped a hint of what he was afraid of, but she is quite certain that there was something desperate behind it all. I am inclined to agree with her. Men don't leave their own country and hide themselves in England, under false names, without a good and sufficient reason. When we find out who it was the man feared so much, I fancy we shall be within measurable distance of getting hold of the individual who committed the crime."

"And what was the dead man's real name?"

"Stanislaus Radzwill."

"And you know nothing of his past history —that is to say, before he came to England?"

"Nothing whatsoever, save his name," Burrell replied. "However, I hope very soon to be able to find out. I'm following up an idea that may possibly lead to something of importance."

"And now," said George, "I'll bid you good-by, and be off to arrange about the dog-cart."

"Good-by, sir, and we'll hope for the best. I should bring a small handbag with me to-morrow morning, if I were you. We may find it necessary to stay the night down there."

George thanked him for the suggestion, and then returned to his own house. By dinner-time he had arranged everything, and was eagerly looking forward to the excursion of the morrow. Before he retired to rest, he once more consulted the letter he had received that day. It was pleasant to remember that she had thought of him in that desperate moment. Had she thought of him since?

CHAPTER VII.

WHEN George looked out upon the world next morning, he was thankful to discover a fine day. The streets were flooded with sunshine, and there was every prospect of its becoming even tropical as the day advanced.

"Put me out a shooting-suit," he said to his man, Edwards, when the latter was preparing his attire. "I'm going into the country."

He had to remember that he was to impersonate a traveling Australian, and for some reason, best known to himself, he imagined that the dress in question would be most appropriate to the character. The prospect of being able to do something that might eventually lead towards the rescue of the woman he loved put him in the best of spirits. He made an excellent breakfast, and in due course set out for Victoria. Arriving at the station, he looked about him for the man he wanted, but for some time could see nothing of him. Then, when there was only five minutes to spare before the train started, and George was beginning to grow anxious, he saw, hastening along the platform, the stalwart figure of the famous detective.

"Good day, Mr. Kilvert," said the latter, as he came up. "I am afraid you must have begun to think that I was going to miss my train. I was detained at the last moment by a bit of business that had to be attended to. I'm here in time, however, so there's not much harm done. Now I must be off and get my ticket."

"You needn't do that," said George; "I've already attended to it. Let us see if we can find a carriage, and manage to have it to ourselves."

A compartment having been discovered, they took their places in it, and George arranged with the guard, in a manner that seemed to be eminently satisfactory to that functionary, that no intruder should violate their sanctity during the journey to Marley. He had scarcely done so before the train started. When they were fairly on their way, George produced his cigar-case, and handed it to his companion. The latter took one, and lit it with the air of a man to whom a good cigar is a thing not to be lightly handled. As they steamed out of the station, George thought of the last occasion on which he had crossed the bridge. Then he had only just seen the beautiful woman who was destined to exercise such a strange effect over him. He looked across the carriage at his companion, who sat smoking solemnly in the corner, the

very picture of a prosperous yeoman on his way to market. It would have seemed natural to have heard him discoursing the prospects of the crops rather than anything else. Yet when he began, as London dropped behind them, to speak of his hobby, George found himself growing interested. Burrell was a very fair conversationalist, and his collection of stamps afforded him famous opportunities of making himself worth listening to. From this he passed to his own profession.

"Yours must be an extraordinary life," said George; "I should say that it is one of continuous excitement."

"You have never made a greater mistake in your life, sir," said Burrell. "A Private Detective's life is, for the greater part, almost as monotonous as any one else's. You will see what I mean when you come to look at it a little more closely. Suppose, for instance, a case is entrusted to me. A trustee may be missing, and there may be heavy defalcations. Well, sir, before I can do anything, I have to make myself familiar with the man and his habits, his past life, and the character he presented to the world and that he had from it—with those of his friends and associates—also whether he gambled or speculated largely and rashly. All this must be ascertained before you can really set to work. Then, if he is miss-

ing, he has to be found, which will mean still more patient study of the case, more drawbacks, just when you think you're going right, and almost endless disappointments and worries. All the time, mind you, sir, you have to be as silent as the grave, and ask neither advice nor sympathy from any one. Of course, when the case is brought off successfully, and the man is in the dock, and you are congratulated for the way you elucidated the mystery, there's a bit of honor and glory attached to it; but when you've been at the work for some years, you get so used to it that you don't attach any great importance to compliments. No, sir; if you want to understand what a private detective's life is really like, you mustn't go to the playwright or the sensational novelist for it."

"I'm afraid I've never looked at it in that light before," George replied. "I have always imagined it to be a life of constant excitement, of life-and-death struggles with desperate criminals, of wonderful disguises, and all that sort of thing."

"You've probably seen the *Ticket-of-Leave Man*, sir," said Burrell, with a quiet smile. "In books and plays the detective is always disguised. Talking of disguises, I can tell you a good story, and it's none the worse because it's against myself."

"I should like to hear it immensely," said

George, composing himself in his corner as he spoke.

"Well, sir," said Burrell, "it was this way. There was a big jewel robbery in a nobleman's house in the Midlands, which I was engaged upon. I had my suspicions as to who the parties who had operated it were, and, after a few inquiries, these suspicions were confirmed. I did not tell the police what I had in my mind, being anxious, you see, to call them in when I had got matters properly arranged. Now, I happened to know where my gentleman was hiding, and he knew that I was aware of it. My mate and I watched the house closely night and day—a fact of which he was also aware. When I had worked the whole case out and was sure of everything, I made up my mind that at night I would take a constable with me and lay him by the heels. I must here tell you that I had taken lodgings at the house opposite, from one of the windows of which I kept my eyes glued on the front door across the way from sunrise until dark. There was a funeral in the next house to that in which my man was, that afternoon, and I had to take care that he did not slip out and get away under cover of the crowd that was watching it. I saw the coffin brought out and the mourners take their places in the carriages. Then the procession moved away, but I still kept my eye on that

front door. At about seven o'clock I sent for the police, and, in due course, we crossed the road, and what do you think we found, sir?"

"I suppose you discovered that your man had bolted?" George answered.

"Bolted, sir? I should rather think the rascal had. It was about as cunning a trick as ever I've known, and I'll give him credit for being so sharp-witted as to think of it. He was always an artful dodger, and, when he was arrested about two years afterwards, he told me all about it himself as bold as brass. As I said just now, he knew I was watching him, and he was, of course, also aware of the funeral next door. There were Rechabites and Oddfellows, and members of all sorts of other societies attending it, and they made a pretty fair procession. Well, my worthy gentleman changed the clothes he was wearing for a black coat and trousers, which he stole from the landlady's husband, donned the latter's top hat, slipped out by a back window when everybody was looking out of those at the front, dropped into the next garden, walked boldly in by the kitchen, through the house, and out into the street, mopping his eyes with a handkerchief as he went. Nobody had time to bother about him, every one naturally supposing him to be one of the invited mourners. He even had the impu-

dence to ride in one of the carriages, attended at the graveside, and drove back with the procession to the town, got out at the railway station, and took the next train to London. The jewels were in his pockets all the time, and, I believe, were never recovered."

"He deserved to get away with them," said George. "A man who had sufficient impudence to do that ought to make his way in the world."

"It brought me a good amount of ridicule, I remember that," Burrell remarked reflectively. "The Regulars took it out of me, you may be sure. They don't let an opportunity like that pass."

With many an amusing anecdote, Burrell beguiled the time between London and Marley. His stories, unlike those of many professional men, were quite original.

Now, as many of us are aware, the village of Marley is a charming little place, and, since the formation of the railway, has made rapid progress. The station itself is something like a quarter of a mile outside the village, and alongside the high-road. When George and his companion alighted, they found a neat dog-cart awaiting them outside. The man who had brought it down from London on the previous evening was standing at the horse's head. George rewarded him and dismissed him, prom-

ising to telegraph later as to where the vehicle would be left.

"Will you drive, or shall I?" he asked, turning to his companion.

"You drive by all means," the other returned. "I cannot say with truth that I am much of a hand with horses. Besides, it will look better for you to be on the box. Australians always drive."

"I thought they always rode," George returned. "But that doesn't matter."

He mounted to the box and took up the reins. Burrell seated himself beside him, and then, having ascertained the direction in which they should proceed to reach Hilburne, they set off. In this particular part of Sussex no rain had fallen for some days, and in consequence the roads were thick with dust, while the green of the hedges was almost obscured. They bowled merrily through the village, turned to the right at the finger-post, ascended the road over the Downs, and then began the long descent into the valley. For upwards of an hour they drove steadily on, through village after village, through farm-land and open down. It was essentially a rural district, and on that particular summer's day, as peaceful a bit of country as a man could wish to see anywhere. When they had been driving for upwards of an hour, they found themselves approaching a tiny ham-

let, smaller than any they had yet seen. It was embowered in trees, was approached by a bridge over a pretty stream, and was dominated by the steeple of an old gray church. On the right, as they entered, was an inn, whose sign on the tree outside proclaimed it the King's Head. Here they pulled up, and surrendered their horse to an individual of the dilapidated jockey type. Having seen the animal led away, they passed into the inn itself. It possessed a charming old-world air, and one could almost imagine the mail-coach pulled up outside, the guard with his blunderbuss, and the timid passengers issuing from it to take their places. On the left hand, on entering, was the bar, paneled in oak, black with age and the smoke of many thousand pipes; on the right was the bar-parlor, or coffee-room, also oak-paneled. Here, doubtless, in bygone days, the magnates of the village were wont to assemble to discuss local affairs, and to drink the king's health with becoming loyalty.

George, however, was too intent upon getting to business to bother himself very much about the house. They walked into the bar, whereupon a young and comely lady, wearing a coquettish cap upon her head, emerged from an inner room to receive them.

"Can you give us some lunch?" George inquired. "We have driven over from Marley."

"What would you want?" asked the damsel, bestowing an appreciative glance upon the handsome young man before her.

"It doesn't matter much what it is so long as we can eat it," he replied. "Anything you have in the house will do."

"There's ham and eggs, cold roast beef and pickles, or I might be able to get a chop or two, sir."

"Cold roast beef and pickles will do admirably," George replied.

Ten minutes later they found themselves in the wainscoted coffee-room, seated before an excellent ham, a round of cold roast beef, and two pewter pots of ale, that would have defied criticism. Burrell proved himself a good trencherman, and by the time they rose from the table, they had made the commons that had been set before them look uncommonly foolish.

"Now, sir, if I were you," said Burrell, "I would just take a short walk down the main street, while I look about me a bit and break the ice with a few preliminary inquiries."

"I'll do whatever you think best," said George. "For how long do you wish to be left alone?"

"Half an hour will be ample," the other replied. "At the end of that time you can safely come back."

George accordingly strolled through the village until he came to the village grocery. He took stock of the tins of meat and other articles displayed in the windows, and then passed on by the butcher's and the blacksmith's, paused at the lych-gate and looked into the quaint little churchyard, and then, having made himself familiar with the topography of the place, walked slowly back to the inn. By the time he reached it, Burrell had made himself quite at home, and when George entered was chatting pleasantly with the buxom landlady in the parlor.

"And what do you think of the village, sir?" he asked, as George entered the room.

"A charming little place," said the supposed Australian, seating himself in an armchair beside the fireplace as he spoke.

"Sort of place you'd like to live and die in," continued Burrell. "Seems so quiet and peaceful that you're almost afraid to speak."

"And yet I suppose it has its own inner life," said George, meditatively—"its own affairs, which to it are of more importance than half the great things that go on in the Outside World?"

"It's terrible dull here in winter-time," put in the landlady, who scarcely followed the drift of the last remark. "When there's snow

about there's nothing doing at all. We're cut off from everywhere then. Last year, about Christmas time, the mailman was found well-nigh dead on the Downs back yonder."

"And that's what they call a good old-fashioned English Christmas, I suppose?" said Burrell, with the air of a man who is not very well acquainted with the customs of the country.

The landlady shook her head.

"Ah, sir," she said, "Christmases nowadays are not what they used to be. Nor are other things, for the matter of that."

"That's certainly so," Burrell replied. "The world is changing very fast. What with Board Schools, bicycles, motor-cars, etc., we're transforming every one and everything."

"I don't hold with Board Schools myself," replied the landlady. "Give me the old-fashioned school where the master was allowed to cane them as didn't obey him, and where the children learnt respect for their elders and betters, and were taught things that were of use to them. What's the use of teaching the dustman's daughter how to play the piano —or his son chemistry and all that sort of rubbish? There's my sister's children in London, sir, they're as pert and forward for their age as they can be. Nothing is good enough for them."

"I am afraid that what you say is right," said Burrell. "You can see it in small things. Take, for instance, the professions. The village laborer's son gets an idea into his head that he is too clever to follow the trade of his forefathers, and goes to London and becomes a clerk or something of that. In time he marries. His daughter declines domestic service, and goes into a factory or a sweet-shop. Then, again, there is the question of names. How many Sarahs, Amelias, Janes, or Rachels do you hear of now? No; the children must be christened Beatrice, Rosalind, and all sorts of high-sounding names like that. Now, I'll be bound, madam, that in the whole of the village there is not a man of my own name, old-fashioned and simple as it is."

"And what may your name happen to be, sir?" the woman asked.

"Augustus," Burrell replied readily; "shortened by my friends into 'Gus.'"

"Well, there, sir, there I think we *can* satisfy you," said the woman, with a laugh. "We've certainly got an Augustus in this village, if there's not one anywhere else."

She laughed again, and from her merriment both the men gathered that the Augustus in question was a well-known character.

"The funny part of it is, sir, that he is called 'Gus,' too," she continued. "Oh, he's a merry

one, is Master Gus, as many know to their sorrow."

"I'm not such a sad dog myself," said Burrell, genially, rubbing his hands together, as was his wont. "And who is my namesake, and what is he so famous for?"

"He's the son of old Squire Hembridge up at the Croft, sir, and I am afraid he's a sore trouble to the poor old gentleman. Not but that you can't help liking him, in spite of his goings on."

Both the men saw that if they let her alone the woman would tell her story in her own way, so they forbore to question her.

"His poor old father sent him to Cambridge University a while back, but they packed him off home again before he had been there a month. I never rightly heard what 'twas for; but something pretty bad, I'll warrant, for they do say his father was main upset about it. Then they tried to make a soldier of him, but he couldn't pass his examination, so now he's back on his father's hands once more, doing nothing but fish and hunt and shoot——"

"And make love to the girls, I'll be bound," Burrell put in, with a twinkle in his eye.

"That's just the worst part of it, sir," the landlady returned. "The rascal has only to look at the wenches, and they fall slap in love

with him and afterwards wish they hadn't, if I know anything about 'em."

It was plain that Mr. Augustus Hembridge was a gay deceiver.

"Come, come," said Burrell, "perhaps he is not so bad as all that. Myself, I like a young man to have an eye for a pretty girl."

"That's all very well, sir, but not for every pretty girl he comes across."

"Of course always in his own rank of life," said George, feeling that it behoved him to say something. "That is what I suppose the individual in question does?"

"Not he! Bless your heart, sir, he doesn't stick to the girls in his own rank of life. It's all fish that comes to his net. There was a young lady who played the organ in the church and taught music, lodging at a house next to Mrs. Updene, the pew-opener's; 'twas said she was going to sue him for breach of promise, but old Mr. Hembridge bought her off. There was Miss Brown at the haberdasher's down the street, who put on pretty airs until he threw her over; there was Mr. Migg's, the butcher's, daughter, he'd 'a been making a fool of her, but her father packed her off to London in double quick time. Lately it's been Polly Heron, the bailiff's daughter up at the old hall where the Frenchman lives, that he's been carrying on with."

On hearing this both men gave a start of surprise.

"So you've a Frenchman living down here, have you?" said Burrell. "For my part, I don't like Frenchmen."

"I don't know that he's exactly a Frenchman, sir," replied the landlady, "but I know he's a foreigner of some sort. But it's not for me to speak—I've never seen him. He's been living at the hall ever since old Squire Smythe died. That's a matter of four years now, come Michaelmas. He lives a solitary life, never comes out of the grounds, or mixes with any of the gentry in the neighborhood."

"Elderly, I presume?"

"Hard upon sixty, I should think. A fine-looking man, so folk say. But, there, sir, here I am running on about the neighborhood like an old gossip. You were asking the way to Mr. Doyle's farm. Well, sir, you can't do better than walk through the village as far as the church, then turn across the fields, and you'll see it straight before you. It's a white house—half a mile or so from the hall. My mother used to say as how it once belonged to it, but Mr. Doyle's family have had it as long as I can remember."

Since his conversation with the landlady and the discovery of Master Gus, George had changed his mind about going on that day.

"I suppose if we decide to stay for the night you could manage to put us up?" he said at last.

"Of course, sir, if you don't mind having things a bit homely like. There's two nice rooms above, and both are as clean as any two rooms in England. You may be sure of that. I like things in apple-pie order myself, as my mother did before me."

"Well, sir, shall we go down to Doyle's farm and have a look at his cattle now, or leave it till later?" asked Burrell, rising and taking up his hat.

"Perhaps we had better go now," his companion replied. "Come along."

They accordingly left the inn, and strolled down the street together.

"What's this about Doyle's farm?" George inquired, when they had proceeded some distance. "Are we likely to discover anything of interest there?"

"Not that I know of," the detective answered. "But we must give some reason for our presence here. As the farmer is a breeder of prize pigs, it will furnish us with a fair excuse. It's very possible you may have to purchase one, sir, but I presume you won't mind that."

"I'd purchase his whole stock if it could do any good," said George. "I suppose you've

come to the conclusion that it was Miss Polly Heron who furnished Madame Cardew with the paper upon which she wrote to me?"

"It looks very like it," said Burrell. "I must try and have an interview with that young lady if possible, and without loss of time."

"Do you think that Madame Cardew is still at the hall? If so, how are we to put ourselves in communication with her?"

"No, sir; I don't think she is there. And I'll tell you why. The mere fact that she wrote to you on that piece of paper seems to me a proof that she was not able to obtain any more; or, put in plainer words, it means that she is a prisoner. How she managed to get it posted is to me a mystery."

"For my own part I should say that Miss Polly Heron posted it," said George.

"That's very likely," Burrell continued. "Now, you will observe that in the letter there is not a word that either incriminates or indeed refers to any one else. Whatever she may know about the murder, it is evident she is not going to turn informer. Otherwise, having the opportunity, she would have put you upon the scent. However, if once we can get hold of Miss Polly, and she can be made communicative, it's possible we may be able to unravel the rest."

George said nothing to Burrell concerning

the great fear that had suddenly taken possession of him. If the girl were so anxious not to inculpate another, there must be some imperative reason to account for it. What was that reason?

When they had walked through the village and across the field indicated by the landlady of the inn, they reached Mr. Doyle's farm, and found that gentleman at home. Burrell introduced himself and his employer, and, with a fluency and an invention that astonished George, described the nature of their errand. From the way in which he spoke, it would appear as if they had traveled all the way from Australia to inspect the members of the porcine family in Mr. Doyle's possession.

Before proceeding to business it was necessary that they should refresh themselves with some excellent cider, after which the farmer escorted them to his piggery. Here George resigned himself to his fate, and trusted to his luck to bring him out of the ordeal without actually proving his incompetence. He know nothing whatsoever about pigs, save that in some mysterious fashion they were made into bacon and hams, and I'm not sure that Burrell was very much wiser. The latter, however, proved himself quite equal to the occasion. He made inquiries as to their pedigrees, dwelt appreciatively on their condition, praised the manner

in which they were housed, and at last selected from among them a young boar upon which he professed to have set his heart. To Mr. Doyle he was a man after his own heart. Before they left the yard, Burrell produced his pocket-book, and made an entry in it.

"If you'll let me advise you, sir, you'll take that one," he said, turning to George, who was wondering how long their conversation was likely to continue, and who would have willingly purchased the whole stock, and have paid for it on the spot, so anxious was he to get back to business once more.

"By all means," replied George; then recollecting himself, he added, "That is, provided, of course, the price is right."

The farmer named his figure, to which Burrell demurred. Five minutes was spent in haggling before the matter was amicably settled. Then the money was paid down in bank notes, and George promised to acquaint the farmer later on as to the destination to which the animal was to be despatched.

"As to the others we've looked at," observed Burrell, "as soon as Mr. MacCormac makes up his mind, I'll drop you a line, and, if he decides to take them, you can send them on at your convenience."

"Thank you kindly, sir," replied the farmer, whose face shone with delight. "You may be

always sure of receiving my very best attention."

The matter being settled, they bade Mr. Doyle good-by, and set off on their walk back to the village.

"A nice sort of thing you've let me in for," said George, when they were out of the farmer's hearing. "I've never owned a pig in my life."

"Well, you've got a beauty now, sir," Burrell replied, with a chuckle. "Haven't you got a country friend who would like to have him?"

"That's not a bad idea," said George, with a laugh. "I'll send it to somebody as a Christmas present. I must look round my acquaintances and find out who is most worthy of the honor." Then to himself, he added, "I wonder what Mildmay would say to it?"

When they reached the inn, they discovered a tall, showily dressed young man lolling in the bar parlor. He had a pipe in his mouth, and a setter was stretched out at his feet. His watch-guard was the lip-strap of a curb-chain, and a pin, representing a snaffle-bit, decorated his tie. He was not a bad-looking young fellow, but weakness was written in every inch of his face. At the moment of their entrance he was engaged in a heated argument with the landlady, and, as the two men observed, he was well advanced in liquor.

"Well, sir, I hope you found your way to Mr. Doyle's farm," said the proprietoress of the inn to Burrell, to whom she had plainly taken a liking. Then, without waiting for him to reply, she continued, "This is Mr. Augustus Hembridge."

"Your servant, sir," Burrell answered politely; while George muttered casually, "How d'ye do?"

Then, in order that Master Gus should properly understand the value of the introduction, she added—

"Two gentlemen from Australia."

"I wish I was out there," replied Mr. Hembridge, stretching out his legs and yawning, but not offering to get out of his chair. "I know any amount of fellows who have gone out there, and one of them wanted me to go with him. But the governor wouldn't hear of it. Now I've got to stay on in this beastly hole and associate with farmers and clodhoppers."

"Come, come, Master Gus, that's not the way to speak of your friends," the landlady answered, with a familiarity born of long intercourse and many arguments. "Your father's lived here all his life, as did his grandfather before him, and I never heard that they had cause to grumble."

"You must have some sort of society in

the neighborhood," said George, hoping to draw the young fellow out.

"Society?" retorted the other, scornfully. "There's the vicar with his three tame cats of daughters. There are the Montgommerys, four and a half miles away; there's the doctor and his wife at Marley; and, if you like, the vet. at Bishop's Bassett. When you've named them, you've exhausted all the society of the neighborhood."

"Surely there's the gentleman at the hall. A Frenchman, so I understood."

"Frenchman be hanged!" answered the polite youth. "He's no more a Frenchman than I am, though the duffers about here call him one. He's a Pole, or Poleski, his confounded name counts for nothing. You won't get much society out of him, if that's what you're thinking about. I've only seen him once, and then he looked at me as if he'd cut my throat. And I don't know that I should mind much if he were to do it; it might save me the trouble of doing it myself later on. But that's neither here nor there. What was it the Governor of North Carolina said to the Governor of South Carolina? 'It's a long time between drinks.' What will you have?"

At any other time George would have refused such an invitation, but, at a glance from Burrell, he accepted, and drank a glass of ale in the

young gentleman's honor. Cigars were then produced, and they sat themselves down to smoke and conversation. Later it was finally decided that the two men should remain at the inn for the night, and Master Gus graciously accepted an invitation to dine with them.

"It's something to do, at any rate," he civilly observed. "The worst of it is, I must go home and make myself tidy first."

To this, however, George objected. "There is no need," he said. "We are not in London. Stay as you are. If you don't mind, I'm sure we don't."

"Egad, do you know, I think I will do that," replied the youth. "I'm very comfortable here, and nobody will notice in this hole whether I am in evening dress or not. But look here, I shan't be able to stay late, as I have an appointment at half-past eight."

Burrell threw a significant glance at George. The other realized what was wanted, and proffered further hospitality, which was immediately accepted. By the time they sat down to dinner their guest's simple tongue was wagging merrily. He commenced by praising his own astuteness in certain horse-dealing matters, then patted himself upon the back as a sportsman, after which he retailed certain episodes connected with his 'Varsity career, which were quite sufficient to account for the short-

ness of his stay at that ancient seat of learning. From the vivacious stage he passed to the despondent; from that to the amatory was but a step. His success with women was a theme upon which he felt he was entitled to do himself justice.

"It shocked the governor and the vicar like old boots," he remarked at the conclusion of a not particularly edifying story. "But, hang it all, what's a fellow to do when they run after him so. I can tell you, when a man has knocked about like I have, he gets to understand women a bit. And they take a bit of understanding, too! There's a pretty little thing down here—I won't tell you her name, but I'm going to see her to-night. She'd give her ears to be Mrs. Hembridge, for she fairly dotes on me; yet, only the other morning, what did I catch her at? Posting a letter to some man in London! I tried to get it out of her about him, but she wouldn't own up to anything. Wanted to brazen it out with me that she hadn't written it, and wouldn't let me look at the envelope. Never mind, I'll find it all out yet, and if the other fellow comes hanging around here, let him look out for himself, that's all. Everybody knows Gus Hembridge is not the man to be crossed. I can take my own part as well as any man, and a bit better than some."

It was plain that the amatory stage was giving way to the pugnacious. At any other time George would have felt inclined to have taken the fellow by the scruff of his neck and have kicked him out of the inn. But, knowing how much depended on their not arousing suspicion, he forbore. As a matter of fact, he produced his cigar-case, and offered the intoxicated youth a weed. The latter was good enough to accept one, remarking as he did that in his opinion the last was not half bad, and then, having lit it, sank back in his chair, closed his eyes, and a few moments later was fast asleep. George and Burrell rose and walked across to the fireplace.

"He's going to meet Miss Polly, I'll be bound," whispered the latter. "We'll follow him, and, when they separate, try to get a few minutes' conversation with the young lady. It will be funny if we can't get some information of value out of her."

"I'd like to give that young blackguard a good thrashing first," said George, eying the youth in the chair with great disfavor.

"It would do him no good," said Burrell. "He is too old for that now. Besides, he's going to help us, and that should make us grateful."

Ten minutes or so later, Hembridge opened his eyes and stared stupidly about him.

"Well, this is a rum go," he said. "You don't mean to say that I fell asleep? I wouldn't have believed it. I am afraid you must think me awfully rude."

"Don't apologize," said George, politely. "The country air makes one sleepy."

"How goes the enemy?" continued the other, drawing his watch from his pocket and examining the dial. "A quarter-past eight! By Jove, I must hurry up! How long are you two going to stay down here?"

"Until to-morrow morning," George replied.

"That's a mighty short visit, isn't it? However, let's hope we shall see you again before very long."

He shook hands with both men, and bade them good night. Then he passed into the bar, where he was heard to order a brandy and soda, and a few minutes later left the house.

"We must follow him," said Burrell. "He mustn't see us, but we must keep him in sight. I wish it was a bit darker."

"In his present condition he won't think of looking round," answered George. "He's too fuddled to be suspicious."

They left the inn, and followed the young man down the village street. He turned to the right, near the linen-draper's shop aforementioned. When he had walked about a quarter of a mile he approached a small wood

or copse, which was entered by means of a stile. Here he stopped, and gave a loud whistle. Presently a girlish figure emerged from the wood.

"We must make a *détour*, and, if possible, get into the copse," said Burrell. "The hall, if I am not mistaken, is on the other side, and that is the way she will go home."

Leaving the lane, they entered the field, and passed along under the shelter of a hedge, until they had advanced a sufficient distance to prevent any possibility of their being observed by the couple on the stile. Having entered the wood, they seated themselves on a bank, and patiently awaited the end of the lovers' *tête-à-tête*. They had longer to exercise their patience than they had anticipated, for upwards of forty minutes elapsed before a light step on the path, a little to their right, announced the return of the girl.

"Now is the time for action," said Burrell, springing to his feet. "Don't say any more than you can help to her about yourself, sir. If possible, let me do most of the talking."

In the shelter of the trees it was quite dark by this time.

Making their way through the bushes, they found the path, and confronted the girl as she was in the act of leaving the wood.

CHAPTER VIII.

"MISS HERON, I believe," said Burrell, raising his hat with all a courtier's politeness to the girl before him.

"That is my name," the astonished maid replied. But I don't know you."

"That is very probable, my dear," Burrell returned. "But I hope before very long we shall be much better acquainted. My friend and I have come down from London on purpose to see you. You are a kind-hearted girl, I know. We have had proof of that, and we'll tell you how directly."

"But what do you want with me?" inquired the girl, in a frightened voice; "and why do you stop me here?"

"Because it would be impossible for us to see you anywhere else," Burrell replied. "You needn't be afraid. All we want of you is some plain answers. And I know you'll give them to us. Shall we walk back into the wood a little way? It would be just as well for us, and also for you, not to be seen talking together in the open."

The girl's fear was momentarily increasing.

"Oh no, no!" she cried. "Let me go! What right have you in this wood at this time of night? I won't go back with you! You frighten me!"

The position was in many respects a difficult one. If she persisted in her refusal, they could not force her, and yet to stand talking to her at that hour, with the chance of some one from the hall discovering them, was a risk neither of them cared to run. It was at this juncture that George came to the rescue.

"I think it would be as well, Miss Heron," he began, "if I were to explain a little more to you. Possibly within the last few weeks you may have chanced upon the name of Kilvert?"

The girl gave a start of surprise. It was plain that her interest was aroused.

"Yes, I've heard the name," she answered. "But what do you know of it? And what has that got to do with your stopping me like this?"

"Everything," Burrell put in hastily, fearing lest George might forget the part he had to play. "Mr. Kilvert is this gentleman's greatest friend. Indeed, when they are in London, they are inseparable. Now, young lady, will you walk into the wood with us?"

She no longer hesitated, but accompanied them back to where they had first accosted her.

"Now, Miss Heron," said Burrell, "if you will allow us, we will tell you our business. Early on Wednesday morning last a carriage, with a lady and gentleman, arrived at the hall. Was that not so?"

As she did not answer, Burrell repeated the question. Once more she did not give any reply.

"The lady was in great trouble," he continued. "She desired to communicate with Mr. Kilvert. You found her the paper, and posted the letter for her, getting yourself into trouble with Mr. Augustus Hembridge in consequence. Am I not right?"

"How did you know it?" she inquired anxiously.

"Because we know a great deal more than you think," the other replied. "Being a sharp girl, you can, of course, see the reason of it all. Now, I put it to you, does it not seem unfair to you to keep this lady away from the gentleman who loves her? You would not like it yourself, would you?"

"I don't suppose I should. But I don't see what that's got to do with it."

"You will very soon," Burrell answered. "Now, you are an English girl, and will probably have an English gentleman for a husband. Supposing you were in Mr. Kilvert's case, what would you do? You'd want to find out where

she is, wouldn't you? Ah, I thought so! Well, that's exactly what Mr. Kilvert wants to do. That's why we're here talking to you now. In order to bring it about, we must have your assistance. Any trouble you may be put to he will be more than willing to pay for."

"But I don't want to be paid," the girl replied. "I don't know that I want to be mixed up in it at all. It's none of my business, and might get me into a heap of trouble if it came out that I'd said anything. But, if I did do anything, it would be for the sake of the lady herself, poor dear. When she let me know that she wanted to write a letter without anybody seeing it, what could I do but bring her the first scrap of paper I could lay my hands on? She hadn't any money, not even a penny for a stamp, but she gave me one of her rings, and I'll keep it to my dying day. If you mean any harm by her, you had better not come to me, for I tell you I'll do nothing to help you."

"Harm?" cried George. "Why, bless your heart, girl, our one desire is to be in a position to rescue her from the power of those who treat her so cruelly. And while we are on the subject, you may be quite sure of one thing, and that is, that if you help her and us, Mr. Kilvert will reward you as never girl was rewarded before. You can ask anything you like of him."

He took from his pocket his letter-case, and from it extracted a couple of bank notes.

"See here," he said, "these are two ten-pound notes. As a proof of our good intentions, will you accept them and buy yourself something pretty with them? They may come in useful for your wedding."

But she would not take them. "I thank you kindly, sir," she said, "but if it's all the same to you, I would rather not. At the same time, seeing that it's plain you are friends of the lady, I will do all I can to help you for nothing. But you must promise me first that you will never say anything to my father or my master about it, for I believe that they would kill me if they found out that I had told you."

"I will give you my word," said George, "that you shall never be known in the matter, unless it is of your own free will. I'm sure my friend here will do the same. Now, tell us all you can respecting the affair."

"I must not be long about it, then," said the girl, "for they will be expecting me back. I only ran out for a few minutes."

Had it been daylight a smile might have been observed on the faces of both men. They reflected that they had already waited an hour and a half for her, while she had been interviewing Mr. Hembridge at the stile on the other side of the plantation.

"We won't detain you any longer than we can help," said George. "Now, what can you tell us?"

"Not very much you don't know already, I am afraid," she replied.

"You know when she arrived at the hall and who she came with, I suppose?" said Burrell.

"Indeed, I do not," the girl answered. "I know that she came early in the morning, and that there were two gentlemen with her. I suppose they were friends of the master's; but he is not the sort of man to tell anybody his business."

"And where is the young lady at the present moment?"

"Good gracious, sir, I don't know!" the girl answered. "They went away in the evening after dark."

"Gone?" cried George, in a tone of anguish. Then, turning to Burrell, he continued, "In spite of what you said this morning, I felt sure she was still at the hall."

"Oh dear, no, sir," said the girl; "they went away that evening. You must understand, sir, that no one lives in the house itself but the old gentlemen, Mr. Poleski. He uses two of the front rooms, and I cook and do for him. Well, sir, very early on the morning that you speak of, he came down to our cottage, which used to be the coachman's house, and

woke us up, telling me to hurry and get breakfast for some friends of his who had driven over to see him. I thought it was a funny time for friends to come, the more so as there was a lady with them; but, remembering that they were foreigners and might have customs of their own, I set to work and got the breakfast, and when it was ready, I took it into the sitting-room, where I found the master and two strange gentlemen."

"Possibly you can give us a description of them?"

"Not very well," she answered. "You see, I only saw them for a moment. I know that one was tall and very dark, and the other was small with broad shoulders, almost a humpy, you might say. And now I come to think of it, I believe that he limped a bit when he walked."

"And what were their ages should you think?"

"Well, sir, the taller might have been from thirty-five to forty, but the other was much older. He might have been sixty or more."

"Had they beards or mustaches?"

The girl considered for a moment before she replied. It was evident that the two men had not made much impression upon her.

"I think the taller had a beard and a mus-

tache," she said. "The little man, I know, was clean shaven."

"Did they speak English?"

"No, sir, not until I came into the room."

"Just one moment, my dear," said Burrell. "You say they were talking another language until you came into the room. Now, how do you happen to know that?"

"You think I was listening at the keyhole I suppose," she retorted, with a touch of asperity. "If you do, you are wrong. You may be cleverer than I am, but I don't suppose you can walk through a shut door with a tray in your hand, can you? I put the tray down on the table in the hall while I opened the door, and that was when I heard them talking in the foreign language. Then I went back and got my tray, and took it into the room, and they at once began talking English."

"I beg your pardon," said Burrell, humbly. "It was quite a misunderstanding on my part."

George played the part of a peacemaker.

"I am quite sure my friend did not mean to offend you in what he said," he remarked.

"I should think not," the girl continued. "I wouldn't tell you a scrap more if he did."

"Please forgive me," said the contrite Burrell. "I had no desire to hurt your feelings. But let us continue. Where was the

young lady while you were laying the breakfast?"

"Locked up in another room up-stairs," she replied. "One of the men—the big one, I think it was—took her up her breakfast."

"And when, and how, did she manage to ask you for the note-paper upon which she wrote that letter to Mr. Kilvert?"

"It was when I was crossing the yard at the back of the house to the dairy after breakfast. I thought it was a funny thing for two men to bring a young lady down to a gentleman's house and to lock her up, and that made me look up at the window of the room she was in. She was standing there, and, as soon as she saw me, she began making signs. At first I couldn't understand what she meant, but presently I could see she was making believe to write a letter. Oh, sir, I never saw such a beautiful lady in all my life! But it was enough to make one cry to look at her. She seemed so sad!"

"But what about the note-paper?" asked George, who was anxious to bring her back to the main point, the interest of which was so vital to him.

"Well, sir, as soon as I understood what she wanted, I ran down home and hunted about my bedroom for some paper and an envelope. But there was only one sheet that I could find,

So I slipped it into an envelope, and that into my pocket, and went back to the house. When I got into the kitchen there was old Mr. Poleski. 'Girl,' he said, for that's the way he always speaks to me, 'there's a lady up-stairs who is in disgrace. She wants to run away with a gentleman of whom her parents do not approve. She was at a ball last night, so they brought her straight away in order that she shouldn't see him. You are not so tall, but your jacket might fit her. If you have one to sell, I will buy it from you for her.' I was so astonished that for a moment I didn't know what to say; but at last I told him I would go and get one, and she could try it on. So back I went home, and when I came up again with the jacket he was still there. 'Bring it up-stairs,' says he. With that he took me to the room where she was locked up, unfastened the door, and told me to go in before him."

"What was the lady doing when you entered?" asked Burrell.

"Sitting down, sir, with her face hidden in her hands. She had a cloak on, but beneath I could see that she was wearing a ball-dress; so it looked as if the old gentleman had told the truth. He said something to her in a foreign language that I did not understand, but she only shook her head. I should have liked you to see her then. She drew herself up, sir, like

a queen, and pointed to the door as if to order him out of the room. Then an idea came into my mind, and, while he was staring at her and arguing, I slipped my hand into my pocket, got hold of the envelope, and placed it in the pocket of the jacket. She saw me do it. 'I thank you,' she said in English, taking the jacket from me. 'It is kind of you to want to help me. Leave the jacket and I will try it on. If it does not fit me, I will send it back to you.' 'You can go now,' said Mr. Poleski, and led me out of the room, locking the door after him."

"And after that?"

"Well, sir, the jacket was brought down to the kitchen about ten minutes or a quarter of an hour afterwards by the old gentleman. 'The lady says that, if you will move those buttons, it will do,' he said. Then he showed me what was wanted, and bade me do it at once. I told him I should have to take it home, as I had no needles or thread in the kitchen. So off I went with it, knowing pretty well what I should find. Sure enough, there it was in the pocket, a letter addressed to Mr. Kilvert, and on another little scrap of paper, pinned to the envelope, was written: 'I thank you from the bottom of my heart. Will you post it at once, and accept this ring as a token of my gratitude?' At the bottom of the

pocket was a lovely ring, worth I don't know how much money. Somehow I wish now I hadn't taken it. After I had altered the buttons of the coat, I took it back to the house and gave it to Mr. Poleski, who I found waiting for me in the kitchen. He told me that he would pay me for it later in the day, and then took it up-stairs. It was very plain that he had not found out anything about the letter that had been placed in the pocket."

"And how did you manage to get down to the village so early in the morning in order to post the letter?"

"I told Mr. Poleski," she answered, "that we had no meat in the house, and that I must go to the butcher's to get some for lunch. He hummed and hawed for a minute, and at first I thought he was going to stop me. But I expect he thought that if he did so some suspicion would be aroused, and in the end he let me go. You may be sure that I was not long in getting away. The post, you see, goes out to London at half-past ten, and I knew that I had not much time to lose."

"And it was then, I suppose," said George, "that you met Mr. Hembridge, whose jealousy was aroused by your not permitting him to see the letter you carried?"

"Well, sir, he did make a bit of a fuss, I must own," said the girl, "but he is all right

now. I think I know the way to manage him."

While she was answering this question, George had been earnestly turning something over in his mind. The temptation was extremely strong, and he was unable to resist it.

"Miss Heron," he remarked, "you said just now that you were sorry you had taken that ring. Would anything induce you to dispose of it to me?"

"Do you mean, sir, that you want to buy it from me?" she asked, with some little surprise.

"I will pay you any price you like to ask for it," George replied, without hesitation. "You may imagine how dear it is to me. What do you say?"

"I couldn't sell it," she answered firmly. "When the lady gave it to me, it would not be the right thing to do, sir, would it? But I can tell you one other thing, sir—something you don't imagine I know."

"What is it?"

"It is that I have found you out, sir. You can't deceive me any longer. You are Mr. Kilvert, the gentleman she wrote to. If that wasn't so, you wouldn't be so anxious to have the ring."

George considered for a moment, and then risked everything on one throw of the die. If

she would not betray him, what harm could there be in revealing his identity? On the other hand, it might possibly do some good.

"Well," he said, "since you have found me out, I suppose there is no good in my denying it. I am Mr. Kilvert, to whom the lady wrote. Is it possible for me to rely upon your keeping my secret? If you don't, I am afraid I am done for."

"You can safely reckon upon me, sir," said the girl, with what was evident sincerity. "But, if you are Mr. Kilvert, why do you pretend to be anybody else? It's the sort of thing that makes folks suspicious, sir."

"I did it for a very good reason," George replied. "If they knew that I were searching for her, they would be sure to carry her off again at once. This is, of course, the thing I am most anxious to prevent. That is why I accosted you under an assumed name. Everything now depends upon your secrecy."

The girl was plainly impressed by the importance attached to her participation in the business.

"As I said a minute ago, sir, you may rely upon me," she answered. "Not a word shall ever pass my lips."

"By the way, at what hour did they leave the hall?" Burrell inquired, after the short pause that followed the girl's last utterance.

"At about ten o'clock, sir. I'm sure of that, for the kitchen clock was striking the hour when father came back from getting the carriage ready. I remember thinking that it was a funny time for them to start."

"And now," Burrell continued, "I want you to describe to me the carriage and the horse, or horses, as nearly as possible as you can remember them. I want you also to tell me who drove."

"I can't tell you that, sir," she replied, "for I didn't see them come or go. But of this I am quite certain. There was no coachman. If there had been I should of course have seen him. They had a pair of horses, and the carriage was like that of the doctor's at Marley, yonder—all shut up, and with a door on each side."

"A brougham, evidently," said George. "But do you remember the color of the horses?"

"They were brown, sir," she replied. "I know that, because just after dinner I went out to the stables and had a look at them. I have always been fond of horses, sir. I wish we had some at the hall."

"And perhaps you have some idea as to which way they went after they passed out of the lodge gates?" said Burrell.

She paused for a moment before she replied. It was evident that her idea on this subject was rather hazy.

"No, sir, I couldn't say for certain, but I think I could make a very good guess as to which way they went. Unless they were going back by the road they came, they must have turned to the right, on the road which leads to Bishop's Bassett. That they came the other way I am quite sure."

"And pray what makes you so certain of that?"

"If you know the country about here as well as I do, you would know without asking that. There's a place we call White Lane, about three miles away. It's called by that name because it's all chalk. There's a little stream that runs across it in one place, and when their carriage came in, I noticed that the wheels were fairly plastered with chalk. There's no other place like it in the neighborhood, so that's how I happen to know which way they came. And now I must really be getting back, or I shall never hear the end of it from father. They can't bear me to be out at night. You won't tell any one what I've told you, will you, sir? I'm so frightened that you will."

"No one shall know a word of what you've said to us, until you give permission," George replied. "I will promise you that. I am too grateful to you for what you have done to have any desire to harm you."

She bade them good night, and was moving

away, when she turned and came slowly back again. Once more addressing George, she said—

"Some day, sir, when all this trouble is over, and you are both happily married, you don't know how I should like to see the lady again."

"So you shall if I can bring it about," George replied; but in his heart he wondered whether that happy time would ever come for him. Then, the future looked too dark for any dawn to come.

Once more the girl bade them good night, and hurried away.

"Now, as there is nothing else to be learned here, I suppose we may as well be getting back to our lodgings," said Burrell, when Miss Heron was out of sight. "All things considered, we've not done a bad evening's work. What do you say?"

"I'm well enough satisfied," said George; "but I wish we knew where they had taken Madame Cardew. Heaven alone knows how they may treat her."

"It's very plain that they are carrying her off with the intention of hiding her until the murder has blown over a bit. That's the only construction I can put upon it. From the precautions taken, it is certain that the plot was most carefully arranged throughout. I

shouldn't be at all surprised if in the end we find that it has a political side."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I don't know exactly what I do mean," Burrell replied. "I have a vague sort of suspicion fluttering at the back of my brain that I cannot lay hold of. We know that the two men who brought Madame Cardew to this place are foreigners, and the fact that their singular host at the hall is a Pole, would warrant the assumption that they are of the same nationality. The murdered man was also a Pole. Now, we all know that that particular corner of Europe is, as a general rule, a hotbed of conspiracy. Why, therefore, should we not presume that the murder was the outcome of some plot?"

"We may suppose whatever we please," George answered, "but how are we to prove it? It's difficult to see what connection an obscure musician, who has been some years in England, should have with that sort of thing. However, you may be right."

"Time will show," said Burrell. "And when it all comes to light, and the young lady is discovered to be innocent, I think, sir, we shall have to say that we owe the greater part of our success to Miss Polly Heron, who, placed in the position she was, has proved herself to be a trump of the first water."

"Hear, hear, to that," George replied.

A few moments later they entered the inn, to find that the bar parlor contained a parliament of yokels, who, mug in hand, and pipe in mouth, were engaged in weighty argument. A tall, thin man, with an enormous nose and stubby red beard, had just gained the attention of the house, and was making the most of his opportunity. He was a saddler by profession, and an orator by choice, and those who did not agree with him in argument were, as a rule, worsted by sheer force of words.

"I tell you as 'ow, in my opinion, she stuck the knife into him and then went off in a boat and drownded herself," he observed, with a flourish of his right hand. "Ned Stevens there wants to know why the body waren't found on the shore. Why, because, as I tells him, it drifted out to sea to be sure, and the boat along with it. Perhaps he never heard o' such things as that happening. Well, I have, and what's more, I've knowed 'em to be true."

"One thing's certain," put in another man, with fine logic, "if she didn't kill the man somebody else did."

"She did it right enough," returned the first speaker; "and it'll all come out, mark my words, in its own good time."

George could bear no more, so strode into the

coffee-room, and shut the door upon the argument and the arguers.

"Here too," he groaned; "and all deeming her guilty. Who is there that has the courage to stand up and say, 'I believe her to be innocent'?"

"Heart up, sir, heart up," said Burrell. "You mustn't let what a pack of ignorant rustics say make you depressed. Bless your heart, they can't see more than a finger's length in front of their noses, and don't want to. We've done a bit of good work to-day, and, if all goes well, we'll do better to-morrow. I've had lots of cases before now that looked quite as black, but I've brought the guilt home to the right parties in the end. As I've told you before, I quite believe in the lady's innocence, and, please God, I'll prove it."

The two men shook hands solemnly.

"We'll start for Bishop's Bassett at ten o'clock to-morrow morning," said George "and commence making inquiries there. One would think it wouldn't be difficult to trace a carriage and pair from village to village, even though they travel at night."

"And now, sir," said Burrell, "with your permission, I'll be off to bed. I like, if possible, when I am on business, to be an early bird. As you remarked to our friend, Master

Gus, to-night, the country air makes one sleepy."

George bade him good night, but did not follow his example. On the contrary, he lit a cigar, and strolled out into the street before the inn. Save for the voices in the bar behind him, there was scarcely a sound to disturb the stillness of the night. Overhead the stars shone brilliantly, the wind just rustled the leaves of the trees in the inn garden, while a nightingale was singing a short distance away. Walking across the street, he leant against a post, and looked up at the planet-powdered heavens above him.

"Poor girl!" he murmured to himself, as if in continuation of the conversation he had just had with Burrell, "shall I never be able to find you and to remove the foul stain with which the world is endeavoring to besmirch your name? And, should I be successful in so doing, will you reward me as I desire?"

He recalled the picture she had presented on the stage of the pavilion at Beachcombe. Who that had seen her then could believe that those white hands were stained with blood?

"I for one will not," he muttered. "I don't think I could, even if she were to tell me so herself."

At last, seeing that the men were being turned out from the house on the other side of the

way, and his cigar being finished, he re-crossed the road, and, bidding the landlady good night, ascended the stairs to his homely, but nevertheless comfortable, apartment.

Next morning he was up and out early, had visited the inn stables to see that their horse was well provided for, and had taken a short stroll before Burrell appeared upon the scene. The latter had slept well, and was in fine trim for breakfast. Delicious ham and the newest of new-laid eggs fortified them against the labors of the day. Orders were afterwards given that the dog-cart should be ready by ten o'clock.

"We mustn't be later, sir," said Burrell, "for we may have to travel a good distance to-day."

Suddenly George noticed an expression of surprise appear on the other's face.

"What is the matter?" he asked.

"If I'm not very much mistaken, that's Miss Polly Heron's voice," said the other. "What can she be doing here at this early hour?"

They were to learn very soon, for he had scarcely spoken before the young woman herself appeared in the passage, *en route* for the front door.

"Good morning, Mrs. Greenly," she cried, looking back over her shoulder. "Thank you very much. I'll be sure to tell father." Then,

as she passed the two men, she said in a low voice to George, "I must see you, sir, at once. Go up the street, and wait under the trees by the stone bridge. I'll come to you there."

When she had said this, she crossed the road, and proceeded in the direction of the butcher's shop.

"What's the matter now, I wonder?" said the astonished Burrell, "Can she have something more to tell us?"

"We shall very soon find out," George returned. "And now let's be off to the *rendezvous*."

Following her instructions, they proceeded down the street, now beginning to wake to the realities of the day. Farmer Doyle, on his way to Marley, passed them in his gig, and gave them a cheery good morning. The orator of the previous evening was taking down his shutters, and informed them that it was "a nice day." The assistant at the haberdasher's, who was engaged in sweeping the steps of the front door, glanced coquettishly at George, and immediately regretted the fact that her hair was in curl-papers, and that a white-stockinged toe was peeping at the world through a rent in her shoe. The young man, however, on his part, paid but small attention to these matters. He was too anxious to hear what Polly Heron had to say to think of anything else.

At last they reached the bridge, and called a halt in the avenue of elms that began on the further side. The warm morning sun shone upon the luscious meadows, the rooks cawed in the trees, while the trout, lying amongst the long weeds of the river, seemed as if they had no care in life save to keep cool and face the swiftly flowing current. As it turned out, it was necessary for the two men to exercise their patience, for something like a quarter of an hour elapsed before they spied the maid who had given them the appointment coming round the bend of the road towards the bridge.

"Here she is," said Burrell. "Now let us hear what she has to say for herself."

CHAPTER IX.

As the girl approached, both men noticed that she had an excited look upon her face.

"I hope you have good news for us," said George. "Perhaps you have discovered which way the men with the lady went, or what their destination is?"

But she only shook her head.

"Mr. Kilvert," she said, addressing George, "I feel almost certain that I have made a terrible discovery."

"What have you found out?" the other inquired, with a frightened look upon his face. "They have not injured her?"

"I have not heard anything of the lady," she replied. "I scarcely like to tell you what I have discovered, and yet I feel sure that I am right."

"Before we can do anything you must tell us what you mean?" said Burrell. "We may be able to help you then."

"It was after I left you last night that I heard of it for the first time," she said. "We don't often see a paper at the hall, but father

had been down to the vicarage and brought one home with him. I read it, and I've been so frightened ever since that I could not sleep for thinking of it."

Both men knew full well to what she alluded, but they still professed their ignorance.

"I mean about that terrible murder at Beachcombe," she continued, clasping and unclasping her hands as she spoke. "The paper says there is a warrant out for the arrest of the lady who is supposed to have done it. It couldn't be our lady—oh, tell me, it couldn't be her!"

"What makes you think it was the lady who was at the hall?" asked Burrell. "How is it you connected her with it?"

"I am sure it is," she replied. "First, because of her being in that evening dress; and next, because that you, Mr. Kilvert, told them at the Inquest that you had saved her life on the cliff the night before. And now you come down here and make me confess that she was at the hall. Oh, it was a cruel trick to play upon me! Now you will tell people, and the police will catch her, and she will think that I told them where she was."

It was evident from what she said that she considered the two men to be in league with the police. It was necessary to disabuse her mind of this without loss of time.

"My girl," said George, "let us plainly un-

derstand each other. It is quite certain that you have guessed the identity of the unhappy lady who arrived at the hall in such a singular fashion, and whom you helped to write to me. Unfortunately, it is only too true also that the police are searching everywhere for her, and that, if they catch her, she will be brought to trial for murder. This gentleman and I, however, are determined to be in a position to prove her innocent of the crime. When I told you last night of my affection for her, I was not deceiving you. I love her with my whole heart, and, as you will therefore understand, I desire to save her at any cost. My companion is a detective, and he is as positive as I am that she is guiltless of the charge."

"That is so," put in Burrell. "Mr. Kilvert has hit the mark exactly."

The reaction was almost too much for the girl. She had spent a miserable night picturing to herself all sorts of horrors as the result of her conversation with the men on the previous evening.

"I told myself, sir, that you could not be so cruel as to desire to do her any harm. If any one did the murder—and I suppose somebody must have done it—it was one of those two men. I feel sure of it; there was a murderous look about them both that frightened me."

This effort of imagination on her part brought

a smile into Burrell's face, but he instantly suppressed it.

"We can trust you, I suppose," he said, "not to breathe a word of your knowledge to any living soul? Her safety—indeed, her very life—may depend upon it."

"You may rest assured, sir, that I will not do so," the girl answered. "They should tear my tongue out before they should get a word out of me."

"And one other thing—do you think your father suspects? He must have known she was at the hall, and if he saw the paper——"

"But, bless your heart, father doesn't think anything about it," she replied. "He would say that it was no concern of his; he's a wonderful man for minding his own business, is father."

"He wouldn't be likely to mention the fact of their visit to any one in the village?"

"He seldom goes near the village, sir," the girl replied. "He wouldn't have gone last night if he hadn't wanted to see parson about one of the glebe meadows. It was parson as gave him the paper, though little use it would be to him, seeing that he can't read."

"Did you happen to read anything of the case to him?" George inquired.

The girl shook her head.

"I never read to him," she replied. "He

doesn't care about it. He says that what's in the newspapers is all *fiddle-faddle*, and that one is daft if they believe a word of it. He's a strange man, is father, and terrible set upon his own opinion. He'd call black white if he thought you liked black the better. But I mustn't keep you here any longer. Oh, sir, I *do* hope you will be able to find the poor young lady, and be able to let folk know that she didn't do that dreadful deed!"

"We will do that, never fear," said Burrell. "Now, I want you in the mean time to take my card and put it in a safe place. Should you hear anything else about these men, or anything that may have a bearing upon the case, will you promise to write to me at once?"

"I'm not much of a scholar," the girl answered, "but I'll do it if I can. I've been thinking it over since last night, and it's my belief they went Bishop's Bassett way."

"Very likely," said Burrell. "And now you run away home like a good girl, and keep your own counsel, whatever you do."

She gave them her promise to do so, and then bade them good-by. When she had passed out of sight, they followed, and made their way back to the inn.

"I hope that young woman will prove as good as her word," Burrell remarked; "all our success depends upon her keeping her tongue

quiet. Let a word of what we know leak out, and the regulars will be down here in a few hours. We don't want that to happen—at any rate, not yet."

Arriving at the inn, they packed their bags, paid their bill, and ordered the horse to be put into the dog-cart at once. Ten minutes later they were driving through the village on their way to Bishop's Bassett. As they crossed the bridge, where half an hour before they had interviewed the girl, they encountered Hembridge with his fishing-tackle. He looked up, and nodded to them as they passed.

"All things considered, it's just as well that that young gentleman didn't pass earlier and find us talking to his lady-love," said George. "He would have been anxious to put into practice some of those threats he so amiably uttered last night."

"Still, we must not be angry with him," Burrell replied, "for if he hadn't been such a lady-killer, it is extremely doubtful whether we should have got the information we now possess. For once in his life he has done a fellow-creature a good turn."

"Let it be counted to his credit, then," said George. "I'll willingly forgive him."

The greater part of the road between Hilburne and Bishop's Bassett lies over downs, which are only habited by the peewit and hare.

It is not until one reaches Thornfield cross-roads that the farm-lands begin again. The distance is twelve miles, roughly reckoned, and the Bassett church clock was striking eleven as they drove up the main street of the tiny village. On the road they discussed the matter in all its bearings, and had arrived at the conclusion that nothing was to be gained by remaining at Bishop's Bassett.

"According to Polly Heron's computation it was ten o'clock when they left the hall," said Burrell. "They'd certainly be here by half-past eleven, and would, in all probability, go on for another eight or ten miles before they called a halt. At any rate, it is my opinion that we should do well to push on to Bedbury, and make inquiries there."

In this George agreed with him, and they accordingly left Bishop's Bassett behind them.

Three miles from Bedbury a bridge was in course of construction, and only a limited space was left for vehicular traffic. To prevent any chance of accidents, a barrier of scaffold poles had been erected, and inside of this stood a watchman's box.

"This is a piece of luck I did not expect," Burrell remarked. "If you will pull up for a minute, sir, I will try to discover where the night watchman is to be found."

George did as he was requested, and Burrell

alighted. Approaching the man in charge of the work, he put some questions to him. When he returned to the cart, and had taken his place in it once more, he said—

"The second cottage on the left as you enter the village. The man's name is Dawkins."

Then they continued their drive. When they reached the village, Burrell left the trap, and made his way towards the cottage in question. He rapped upon the door, which was opened to him by an elderly woman. A discussion followed, which resulted in the detective entering the house. An interval of ten minutes elapsed before he emerged again, and, from the smile he saw upon his face then, George gathered that he had been successful in his inquiries.

"There's an inn a little way down on the other side, the woman tells me," he said. "Had we not better put up there for an hour or so and bait the horse? It's only a few steps, and if you will drive on I'll walk across."

George did so, and drove into the yard of the inn, where he surrendered his horse to an ostler he found there. Then, having bade the man give the animal a good meal, he walked round to the front of the house to meet Burrell, and to enter the inn with him.

Let intending travelers be warned that the Goat and Compasses at Medbury, cannot in any way compare with the King's Head at Hilburne.

Comfort reigns at one, discomfort at the other.

"Let us hope that we are not destined to remain here very long," said George, as he surveyed the meal that was placed upon the table for their consumption. "This sort of fare would soon prove too much for me. However, I suppose we must do the best we can with it. And now tell me what you learnt at the cottage?"

"Well, in the first place," said Burrell, "I discovered that the carriage passed that way between eleven and twelve on the night in question. The watchman remembers it because it was the only one that went by during the night. One of the horses shied at his lanterns, and the man called out, in what the old fellow termed 'a foreign lingo,' to know how much further it was on to Medbury Clump."

"Where on earth is Medbury Clump?"

"A small wood about three miles or so further on, I am given to understand. The road runs through it, cutting it in two."

"But what business could they have in a wood at that time of night?"

"That's another of the things we've got to find out," said Burrell. "If I might hazard a guess, I should say that, acting on some prearranged plan, a change of horses was sent to meet them there. Their own animals would

be about done up by the time they got as far."

"That did not occur to me," said George. "Let us get on to Medbury Clump by all means, and with as little delay as possible."

Accordingly, when their horse had had an hour's rest, he was once more harnessed and the drive recommenced. On leaving Medbury, as cyclists are doubtless aware, the road commences to ascend steadily for something like three miles—that is to say, until it reaches its highest point on a thickly wooded hill. This was Medbury Clump, of which mention has been made. Walking their horse up the last part of the hill, they came to a standstill at the summit. The wood bordered the road on both sides, and consisted mainly of firs. In some places it was so dense that it was impossible to see more than thirty yards into it.

"Just the place for horses to be kept waiting," said Burrell, eying it critically. "Even in the daytime you might hide a cavalry regiment in it without any fear of its presence being discovered."

"If you'll look after the horse for a few moments," said George, "I'll get down and explore it. It's just possible there may be tracks to show where they waited, and from which direction they entered."

Handing the reins to his companion, he de-

scended from the cart. Then, choosing the right side of the road, he set off. He was absent something like a quarter of an hour, but when he returned, it was plain from his face that he had been unsuccessful.

"Now I'll try the other side," he said, "and see if there is anything to be discovered there."

Once more he disappeared into the wood, disturbing a fine cock pheasant before he had proceeded many yards. Wood-pigeons cooed in the trees, but no other sound was to be heard. Here and there rabbits sprang up from their nests of fern, and regarded him with startled eyes, and then scampered off to tell their brethren of the stranger who had invaded their peaceful domain.

"Hulloa, what's this?" said George to himself, as he suddenly caught a glimpse of what looked like a building a hundred yards or so deeper in the wood. "Here is a shed of some sort."

He hurried towards it, to find, on closer inspection, that it was a rough structure of hurdles and brushwood, built for a shelter, but now much fallen to decay. Whether it had been erected by gipsies or woodmen there was nothing to show. One thing was evident, however—horses had been stabled in it, and not at a very remote date. Their tracks were plainly discernible on the soft, sandy soil, going in op-

posite directions. After examining them both, and having satisfied himself that they were made by more than one horse, he decided to follow those going in a contrary direction to that by which he had come. They eventually brought him out of the wood on the south side of the hill. After more patient search, he traced the hoof-prints down the hillside to a gate in the field at the bottom. Thence a bridle-track ran towards a farm a mile or so distant. Feeling that for the present he had learned enough, he once more climbed the hill and entered the wood. Thence he revisited the shelter, and then took up the other tracks, and followed them until he reached the bank on the side of the road, some eighty or a hundred yards from the spot where Burrell was waiting. The bank at this place was less steep than at any other, and from this fact George came to the conclusion that the man who had charge of the horses was well acquainted with the lay of the country.

He thereupon called Burrell up.

"It seems to me that we've not been sent on a wild-goose chase after all," he said, when the other brought the horse to a standstil opposite the spot on which he stood.

"It is very evident," said Burrell, when he had heard what George had to say, "that the farmer whose house you have seen from the

other side has taken some sort of hand in it. Perhaps we had better pay him a visit, and see what we can get out of him."

George agreed, and once more mounted to his place in the cart. The descent of the hill on the other side was a steep one but after this the road ran, straight as an arrow, almost as far as the eye could reach. The small village of Thetford lay to their right about three miles distant ; the left was all open country. Having reached the bottom of the hill, the travelers found themselves opposite a broken gate, kept open by a large stone. From this a rough cart-track led to the farmhouse which George had observed from the top of the hill. They turned in, and drove along the ill-kept roadway until they arrived at a second gate, which opened into what had once been a garden, but which was now only an unkempt and uncared-for wilderness.

"Things don't look very promising here," said Burrell, as he prepared to alight to open the gate. "I shouldn't be at all surprised to find the place unoccupied, and that whoever brought those horses, stabled them here without any one's leave or license."

Pushing open the gate, he held it open while the dog-cart passed through. After that he strolled along beside the vehicle until they reached the front of the farmhouse. It proved

to be a long, rambling building, and had evidently been added to at various times. The roof was thatched, and stood in great need of repair. Many of the windows were broken, while there was an ominous crack in the wall beside the porch that argued a considerable settlement in the foundations below. The drive was overgrown with weeds, and a miniature hay-crop might have been cut from what had once been a lawn. George pulled up at the front door, while Burrell entered the porch, and sounded a resounding rat-tat with his knuckles. No answer, however, rewarded his efforts.

"Just as I thought," he said, when he had waited for a couple of minutes. "Nobody at home."

He knocked again, with the same result. After one or two more attempts to make himself heard, he left the porch in despair. At that moment, however, an elderly retriever came round a corner of the house, and surveyed the intruders.

"Ah! this puts a different complexion upon affairs," said Burrell. "Let us see whether we can find the dog's master."

With that he passed the apoplectic creature, and proceeded round the house to the regions behind. He had not been gone many minutes before he returned, bringing with him a shock-

headed individual of the laboring class. The man had a keen and somewhat cunning cast of countenance, and, though he touched his hat politely to the driver of the dog-cart, it was very plain that the respect thus shown was more an attempt to curry favor than to pay homage. It was evident that Burrell had spoken of George as his employer, for the reason that the man stood beside the wheel and waited for him to speak.

"I understand that this farm is to let," said George, after he had received a suggestive look from Burrell, who was standing behind the man. "I should be glad to put my horse up for an hour or so and have a look round."

"The stables is not much good, sir," said the man in broad Sussex. "There hasn't been a hoss in 'em for this long time past, and I don't know as 'ow yours will be any the better for going into them. We've had strangles, and this 'ere 'fluenzi and all sorts of other things in 'em. If I had a hoss that was anything like a hoss I wouldn't put him there. What's more, the farm's no good. Nobody has ever been able to make it pay."

"That's as you think, my friend," Burrell remarked. "The gentleman knows very well what he wants to do. Mark my words, the agent won't be best pleased if he were to know

that you've been trying to put a likely tenant off in this way."

"I ain't trying to put no tenant off," said the man. "All I am sayin' is the plain truth. If the gentleman wants to put his horse up let him do it, but don't let him come and complain if hit goes wrong afterwards."

"I'll risk that," said George; and, turning his horse round, he drove through the gate in the direction they had come.

The stable-yard lay at the back of the house, and had once been an imposing affair; now, however, it had fallen sadly to decay. They took the horse from the cart between them, and the yokel led him towards a low building on the further side of the yard. This, like the rest of the place, was in a most ruinous and dilapidated condition. A long manger ran from one end to the other, while swinging bars separated the horses.

"What have you got to feed him on?" George inquired. "I suppose you could manage to find him a mouthful of hay if you care to do so?"

"I may, or may not, be able to," returned the yokel. "I'll have a look presently and see what I can do. How long do you think you will be staying?"

"That all depends upon circumstances," George replied. "I want to take a stroll round

the place and to ask a few questions. Is there no one on the place but you?"

"Not a mother's son," the man replied. "Ever since the old governor hung hisself in the barn yonder the place has been empty. They calls me the caretaker, but I dunno as I am taking care of anything, unless 'tis rats they're thinking of, and there's millions of them 'ere. Folk do say as 'ow the governor's ghost walks around at night. I say 'tis a pity 'e don't. 'Twould be sort of company like."

While this conversation had been going on, George had thrown a rug over the horse's back, and was now standing at the half-door that led into the stable. Burrell meanwhile had been looking round the yard, and was now coming towards him.

"Must have been a fine old place in its time, sir," he remarked, as he came up to George. "There are stables here big enough to hold a hundred horses. That, I take it, was the brew-house yonder?"

He pointed to a building on the further side of the yard. The rustic confirmed his opinion, adding that there was very little beer about the place now.

"And now, sir," said the latter, when they had exhausted the yard, "what would you like to see next? There's been a good many people out here to see the place, but nobody has

been right over it. There's the water-meadows down by the river, what is flooded every year; there's the bit of arable yonder on the top; there's the clump on the brow of the hill; and there's another three fields and meadows away alongside the high-road. You can take your choice as to where you begin. It's all the same to me."

From the manner in which he spoke, George saw that he had no desire to begin at all, and that it was evident that, if the letting of the farm depended upon him, it would in all human probability remain untenanted for the term of his natural existence. A more uninviting specimen of his fellow-man it had never been George's lot to discover. Yet with it all the haunting suspicion was rising in the latter's mind that the fellow was not as obtuse as he desired they should believe him to be. Every look at him was confirming this belief.

"Let us take a look at the house and the home buildings before we go any further," said Burrell. "It seems to me from the state everything is in that it is scarcely worth our while entertaining the notion of taking the place at all."

"That's as you please, sir," answered the man. "Where will you start? Down in the cellars or up in the garrets?"

"Let us commence with the old brewhouse,"

Burrell answered; and led the way across the yard in the direction of the building indicated.

It was a large affair, and must have been substantially built, for it was in much better repair than the rest of the place.

"I do not care about this," said George. "Let us look at something else."

From the brewhouse they proceeded to the dairy. Milk-pans and churns were gone, and the plate-shelves were all that remained of its former glory. The tiles that had once decorated the walls had fallen from their places, the bricks of the floor were broken, and rats' holes were to be observed in every direction. A store-shed was visited, with the same result. A cart-shed followed, and then they turned the corner of the square, and came through the building in which their horse was stalled. From that they passed into a root-shed, then through three loose boxes, in two of which the roof had fallen in, and then arrived at another and more comfortable stable. One glance at this was sufficient to show that two of the stalls had lately had horses in them, and George was quick to draw attention to the fact.

"That's where Mr. Codd's the agent's horses were put," the man replied. "He was over here two days ago, and he always puts them in here."

"Shows his good taste," Burrell remarked.

"I never knew before, however, that Mr. Codd drove a pair."

George stared at Burrell in some surprise. The thing was so innocently said that for the moment he believed that the detective was acquainted with the agent in question. The caretaker was evidently disconcerted.

"Well, he don't often do so," the man admitted, and then muttered something to the effect that "a gentleman had driven him out that day."

"I see," said Burrell. "And when the agent is driven over by a friend, you keep his horses for two or three days and put bedding under them. Bracken makes splendid litter."

The man abruptly closed the door, and hurried them on their tour of inspection. The calf-pen and cart-sheds and other buildings were devoid of interest. Crossing the yard, they made for the back door of the house. As they reached it, Burrell noticed a thin column of smoke rising from a chimney above the best range of stabling.

Your rooms are up there, I suppose?" he said, turning to the man and pointing to the windows that looked out over the yard.

"They are, but what of that?" the man replied. "When you've seen what the house is like, you'll say you wouldn't live there yourself."

They entered the building and made their way along a passage to what had once been the dining-room. Now, however, it was in a most dilapidated condition. The paper hung in strips upon the walls, while the wainscoting echoed to the scamper of rats. Thence they passed across the hall into the drawing-room, which was in a similar state. Eventually they reached a bedroom on the first floor, the windows of which overlooked the garden. Here a strange discovery awaited them. A heap of straw lay in one corner, pressed down, as if by the weight of a man. Charred logs lay in the fireplace, and a tin plate and cup decorated the mantelpiece. Burrell threw a hasty glance at the straw, then went to the fireplace and examined it, after which he went to the window and looked out He drummed with his fingers on the pane, and then meditated for a few moments. At last turning to the man, he said—

"Just go into the next room, my man, and hammer on the wall, will you?" I want to see how they sound."

The man departed grumbling.

"What made you send him off like that?" George asked in a whisper, when the other was out of hearing.

In reply, Burrell crossed to the mantelpiece, and took up something that lay upon it.

"Do you see that?" he inquired, carrying

it to the window and rubbing it upon the back of his hand.

"I see it, right enough," George replied; "but I can't say I understand what it means. What is it?"

"It's the key to the whole mystery," said Burrell. "If ever you've been in Russia you'd know what this is."

He smelt it and turned it over. "That's a specimen of brick tea," he said.

"And, in your opinion, what does its presence here mean?"

"It means that the man who slept on the straw here was the same individual who brought the horses. That's all!"

CHAPTER X.

THE importance of Burrell's discovery could scarcely be over-estimated. There could be little, or no doubt that it was in the room in which they were then standing that the man who had brought the horses to the farm had slept. From the presence of the fragment of brick tea it might also be argued that he was a foreigner, and in all probability a Russian. Burrell had scarcely stowed it away in his pocket before a ponderous thumping reached them from the adjoining room. It was the caretaker who, according to instructions, was endeavoring to prove the stability of the walls. It was as if he were trying to bring the whole house about their ears.

"That will do!" cried Burrell, at the top of his voice; and a moment later the man stood before them.

"Your friend, the foreigner, must have had a comfortable bed here," said Burrell, pointing to the heap in the corner. "Pray how much did he pay you for allowing you to put up his horses?"

The man stared at him in amazement, his mouth opening and shutting like a frog's.

"I dunno what you mean," he said at last. "I dunno no foreigner, no more than you do. How should I? What would a foreigner be doing here?"

"Then who slept on that straw?"

If the man was not as stupid as he pretended to be, he was certainly an excellent actor, and also a liar of the first water.

"That's where my brother slept," he said readily enough. "He came over to see me last Sunday, and it began to rain just when he was starting off, so he stayed the night in this 'ere room."

"And you put him up over here, instead of allowing him to share your quarters. You're certainly a model host."

As he said this, Burrell led the way downstairs and out into the yard.

"I don't think we need see any more, sir," he said to George. "The place would cost a mint of money to put in repair."

"I wouldn't live in it for all the money in the world," George answered. "Now let us be off as soon as possible."

Turning to the caretaker, he inquired how far it was to Medbury.

"A matter of four mile," the man returned vaguely. "Turn to your left when you

get on to the turnpike, and keep straight on."

The horse was brought from the stable and once more placed in the dog-cart. Then, having tossed the yokel a coin, George climbed to his seat, Burrell took his place beside him, and the drive recommenced. The afternoon, by this time, was well advanced, and the horse was beginning to show signs of fatigue. They were then well over the borders of Sussex, and into Hampshire.

"I wonder how much further we shall have to chase them," said Burrell, after they had partaken of supper at the Black Bear at Medbury, and were discussing the various points of the case.

"Goodness alone knows," said George, who that evening was in a depressed condition. "But go on we must if we have to follow them across England. It seems to me that years have elapsed since we left town. But I am off to bed! Good night!"

Burrell bade him good night and, after a stroll in the inn garden, retired also.

Next morning, as soon as they had breakfasted, they pushed on again, making inquiries as they progressed, but learning nothing new. A party of gipsies affirmed they had seen the carriage on the night in question, but a few moments' cross-examination was sufficient to

prove the false character of their intelligence. A broken-down tinker remembered a brougham passing, when he lay trying to sleep in a ditch. He thought the driver talked like a foreigner when he questioned him as to the road. Unfortunately, however, a few inquiries elicited the fact that he was too inebriated on that particular night to remember what the carriage was like, or, for that matter, very little about anything else. An unpleasant surprise greeted George during the day. Acting as they had done on the preceding days, they stopped for lunch at a village inn. While Burrell was making certain inquiries, George strolled down the street, to presently find himself before the door of the local police-station. A large notice-board stood on the left hand of the entrance, and, without thinking what he might find, he glanced at it. There were several notices relating to missing horses and cattle, the description of a body found drowned, and lower, an ominous sheet headed "MURDER." Then followed a short description of a woman, Cecilia Cardew by name. As if fascinated, he read on, noted that her height was about five feet eleven inches, that she possessed a fine figure, dark eyes and hair, and was supposed to be wearing a cloak. Any one cognizant of her whereabouts were requested to report the matter immediately to the nearest police-office.

George turned away from it with a shudder.

"Poor girl, poor girl," he muttered, "to think that it should come to this."

When George returned to the inn, Burrell saw that there was something amiss.

"What is it, sir?" he asked. "I can see that you are upset by something. Can I help you in any way?"

George informed him of what he had seen.

"You mustn't take on about that, sir," the detective replied. "They were bound to issue it. You may be sure they've sent one to every police-station in England."

"That makes it all the worse," said George. "It is awful to think that she may possibly be run down by some rustic who has just learned enough to read that poster."

Burrell saw that his companion was thoroughly upset, and that nothing he could say would be likely to comfort him.

"It's my opinion," he said at last, "that we are on the wrong track. Did you notice a road branching off to the right some three miles back?"

"I did, and I remember wondering at the time which we ought to follow. Where does it lead to?"

"To Heylstone," said Burrell. "They tell me it is a very quiet road. I feel certain the

carriage didn't come this way. There's a market town five miles ahead. They'd steer clear of that."

"In that case I think we had better go back and try the other road," said George; and then added in an aggrieved tone, "It's only so much time wasted."

They accordingly drove back upon their tracks and branched off at the finger-post, which informed travelers that the bye-road led to Heylstone, Belstone, and Pethorpe. Burrell's informant had certainly not been wrong when he had told him that it was a quiet road. At the same time he might have added that it was one of the worst roads in England. It had not been metaled for years, and deep ruts existed, in places, that might easily have overturned a vehicle.

"They must have had a nice experience if they came along here in the dark," said George, who found his time well occupied keeping his horse and wheels out of the yawning chasms.

When they had been following the road for upwards of three miles, they came upon another gipsy encampment. From the appearance of the grass by the roadside, and other evidence, it was plain that the tent had been there for some days. George pulled up, and immediately he did so two or three ragged urchins came running forward, whining for coppers. A

black-bearded man, stretched out upon the grass before the entrance to the tent, watched them with sleepy curiosity. Upon George giving him to understand that he wished to speak with him, he came forward sulkily. In answer to the usual question as to whether he had seen a carriage, he replied that he had. It was drawn by two horses, and was a closed one. It came by about an hour before daybreak, and they had met with an accident a mile or so up the road.

"An accident?" asked Burrell. "What happened?"

"Broke the back axle," the man replied.

He informed them that he had not seen it himself, but one of his girls had told him about it. There were two gentlemen and a lady in the carriage, and one of the gentlemen had given his girl five shillings to go to Heylstone for a blacksmith.

"Where is the girl now?" Burrell inquired.

In reply, the man pointed to the tent.

"Just tell her I should like to speak to her," said Burrell to the man. "We must inquire into this."

The man slouched across to the dwelling in question, and, in response to his summons, a sharp-looking girl of about fourteen years of age emerged.

"I hear that you went to Heylstone for a

blacksmith to do something to a carriage that broke down the other night?" said Burrell, when she stood before the cart. "What became of the three people who were in it?"

"The lady and the old man walked on," the girl answered. "The other gentleman stayed with the carriage. It was 'im as give me the five bob."

"And did you bring the blacksmith back with you?"

The girl nodded.

"Which way did the gentleman and lady go?"

"Straight along the road," was the reply.

"Did you see them again on your way back?"

"No! I never set eyes on them again!"

"And what became of the carriage?"

"It's in the blacksmith's yard now," she answered. "I saw it there this morning."

"The deuce it is," said Burrell to himself. Turning to George, he added, "Then all I can say is, the best thing we can do is to go and have a look at it."

Tossing the girl some money, George whipped up his horse, and they drove on.

"It seems to me that we are just beginning to get to the heart of things," said Burrell. "I shall enjoy having a look at that brougham."

A quarter of an hour's drive brought them to Heylstone. It was a small place, consisting

of not more than thirty houses, situated in a hollow, and looking as if it had strayed away from Civilization and forgotten the way back again.

"Good gracious, what a hole!" said George. "Fancy living one's life out here. One might as well be in Central Africa."

"No blacksmith's shops in Central Africa, sir," said Burrell, with a smile. "There's one here, however, and what's more, it's likely to prove of use to us. If I'm not mistaken, that's it on the left."

This turned out to be correct, and they drew up before it. The gipsy's statement appeared to be a true one, for, in the small yard beside the shop, stood a brougham, the back portion of which was propped up on a large block of wood. In the shop the smith was hard at work at the forge. Burrell called him out.

"Good day," he began, when the other made his appearance outside the door. "I want you to give us some information. I understand that a night or two back a gipsy girl came to tell you that a brougham had broken down on the road from Medbury?"

"That's quite correct, sir," the man replied, civilly enough. "The axle broke in one of they ruts, and a nice job I've had getting the thing here. The gent it belonged to seemed terrible upset about it."

"Have you any idea of the reason for their traveling so late, or, I might say, so early?"

"The gentleman explained that by saying that they were going across country to see a lady, who was dying."

"He was a foreigner, was he not?"

"Something like that, sir," said the man, but very pleasant spoken all the same. "He helped me to get the carriage here, and told me to repair it, giving me two poun' ten in advance for my trouble. That's something like a gent!"

"Did you see the lady and the gentleman who were in the carriage?"

"No, sir; they had walked on ahead," he said. "He was to find another carriage and pick them up."

"Did he obtain one?"

It would appear that the blacksmith had lent him an ancient conveyance of his own, to which the stranger had harnessed his horses, promising to return it later, and leaving the brougham as security. He had returned it the same day.

"Perhaps, as he told you so much, he may have said how much further he was going?"

"Only a matter of ten miles or so, I believe. To Arlsford. May I make so bold though as to ask your reasons for putting these questions to me?"

"I am doing so because we are rather interested in the gentlemen," Burrell replied

vaguely. "We want to find out whether his story of the dying relative is genuine."

"Oh, I think it is, sir," said the man. "He seemed so cut up about not being able to get on that I didn't have any doubt about it. I felt quite sorry for him."

"And now let us have a look at the injured carriage," said Burrell, descending from the dog-cart as he spoke. "Some carriages have as plain a tale to tell as a book, to the man who can read them aright."

He approached the vehicle in question, and set himself to examine it. It was of a somewhat antiquated pattern, but the wheels were rubber-tyred, and there was a new speaking-tube to the box. Lifting the mat that covered the bottom of the driver's seat, he examined the flooring, after which he opened the door and looked at the interior. Then he turned to the wheels, and made a note of the name upon the brass cap of the hub. He also carefully scrutinized the cushions on the box and upon the seats inside. This finished, he gave his attention to the faulty axle. To examine this properly, he was compelled to perform what was almost a gymnastic feat. Lying upon his back, he wriggled himself underneath, in order to obtain a glimpse of it.

"Ha, ha!" he said, as he scrambled out again, and got on to his feet and brushed his

clothes; "it seems to me that this axle has broken before."

"I noticed that myself, sir," said the blacksmith. "If it hadn't been for the precious bad job they made of it, this accident would not have happened."

Having discovered his opportunity, and coming to the conclusion that he had found some one who would listen to him, he began to enlarge upon the various parts of his trade. Burrell, however, cut him short.

"Now, look here," said the latter, "I want you to look at this matter in a proper light. I'm as certain as possible in my own mind that the story the man told you was not genuine. We know enough of him at any rate to prove that he is a thorough scoundrel."

"I'm sorry to hear it, sir," the smith replied; "but I don't see how he can do me any harm. I haven't commenced work on that carriage yet, and, whatever he may be, I've got his two poun' ten."

"In that case, you're probably a great deal more fortunate than most people," said Burrell, who by this time saw his line of action. "Let me impress one more thing upon you, however. Whatever you do, keep your tongue quiet about this business. Don't go talking about it amongst your neighbors, or it may get you into trouble."

"As I said just now, sir, I don't see how it could," the man replied obstinately. "I haven't done anything wrong."

"At first glance that seems like a very good argument," Burrell returned. "But let me put it to you in a different way. Suppose that carriage should happen to have been stolen, and was discovered by the police in your yard? What would people think?"

"They may think what they please," the other returned, "but they can't hurt me. There's the gipsy girl who will be able to prove that I had nothing to do with the stealing of it. She came to fetch me at the man's instructions."

"And where would the gipsy girl be when there was trouble in the wind? And, again, what faith would be placed in her evidence? Tell me that! No, my friend; if I were you I should keep a silent tongue in my head."

"What's more," said George, producing a five-pound note from his letter-case, "here is something which may help you to be silent. I shall make inquiries, and if, at the end of six months, I find you have said nothing to any one in the village about the matter we are investigating, you shall have another to put alongside it."

It seemed as if the man could scarcely believe that he had heard aright. He stared at the

note George handed him as if unable to trust the evidence of his senses.

"Lor' bless my soul alive, sir!" he said at last, "you're a proper sort of a gentleman, and no mistake. This is the best job I've ever done in my life. Two poun' ten from t'other one, and now five poun' from you, and a promise of another five poun' in six months if I don't go a-talking. Dod drat it! don't I wish a carriage would break down every week in this quiet old road. You can rest easy, sir, and needn't be afeared that I'll breathe a word to any one about your questions. If I do, you may keep the other five poun' and I'll give you this one back."

"Very well, my friend, I'll trust you," said George. Then, turning to his companion, he continued, "Now, I think we may be jogging on. There's nothing more to be learnt here."

Burrell agreed with him, and they thereupon continued their journey.

The sun was sinking behind the hill when they found themselves on the outskirts of the village of Arlsford. Once more they sought the hospitality of the village inn, and, on this occasion, as at Hilburne, they had the good fortune to find themselves comfortably installed. The landlord was a jolly old fellow, fond of his joke, and, as could be seen at first glance, an inveterate gossip. It soon became apparent that

he knew all the ins and outs of his neighbors' affairs as well as he did his own, and, what was worse, he was not above talking about them. He and Burrell were on friendly terms immediately, and, before the latter went to bed that night, he had heard the reason why Squire Trowbridge gave up the hounds, how it was that Farmer Giles did not marry the pretty widow who kept house for the doctor, and why Will Ralph, the shoemaker, was not able to pay his debts. Not a word, however, could he gather of the people of whom they were in search.

"And yet they must either have obtained another conveyance at Arlsford and have gone further on, or be somewhere in this district still," said Burrell. "The fact that they had not allowed for the breakdown would lead one to suppose that this place was their destination; and, as it is extremely unlikely, if not improbable, that they would stay in the village itself, it strikes me we should begin by looking for them outside."

"Before we give in we'll search every house in the neighborhood to find them," said George. "The luck which has followed us so far will surely not desert us now?"

In this spirit they began their search next morning. As they soon realized, it was likely to be a long business. To begin with, they

made a tour of the village, in order to familiarize themselves with it, and, if possible, to ascertain the names and abodes of the principal residents. This occupied them until lunch-time, and brought them no satisfactory result.

"Now, look here, sir," said Burrell, when they discussed the matter over their cigars afterwards, "I've been thinking the matter out, and have come to the conclusion that it doesn't take two of us to do this sort of thing."

"What are you going to suggest then?"

"Well, sir, as you know, there is that brougham to be thought of. Now, my idea is, if you don't mind, to go back to Beachcombe, and endeavor to trace out as far as possible the history of the carriage. If once we can discover the original owners, and who purchased it from them, also where the horses were stabled for the earlier part of the night on which the murder was committed, it seems to me it should be possible for us to get a clue as to the identity of the men we want. Once establish that, and leave me to find out the rest. What do you think of my plan?"

"I think it admirable," George replied. "When do you propose starting for Beachcombe?"

"First thing to-morrow morning, sir," Burrell answered.

At ten o'clock next morning, therefore, the detective left for the scene of the murder, and at half-past ten George ordered his dog-cart and drove into Greythorpe, a somewhat larger village about four miles away. In the main street he discovered a house agent's office. A brass plate upon the door gave the gentleman's name, and also set forth the fact that he was the London representative of a well-known Fire Insurance Company in that part of the country. Pushing open the door, he entered the office, where he accosted a small boy, perched on a high stool, reading a newspaper. The youngster informed him that Mr. Garroway had just stepped outside for a minute, but if he, George, would take a seat, he would hasten out and call him back. George did so, and the youngster disappeared on his errand.

In something less than five minutes the lad returned, accompanied by a stout, pompous gentleman, some fifty years of age, who resembled a prosperous City merchant rather than an auctioneer and estate agent in a country village.

"Pray step into my private office, my dear sir," he began, as he approached Kilvert. "We shall be more comfortable there."

As he spoke, he threw open the door of an inner office and signed to George to enter. The

latter did so, to find himself in a room so small that it would have been well-nigh impossible to swing the proverbial cat in it. A large proportion of the apartment was taken up by Mr. Garroway's writing-table and chair, while what space remained was divided between an iron safe, a couple of chairs for clients, and a pigeon-hole cupboard, in which one might suppose the secrets of the neighborhood were hidden away. The walls were covered with plans and placards announcing forthcoming sales of property.

"Pray be seated," said Mr. Garroway, with another bow. "What can I do for you? Perhaps you require some shooting or fishing, a snug little box for the Hunting Season, or possibly a Stud Farm. In either of these matters I fancy I may be of considerable assistance to you."

"You are very kind," George returned; "at the present, however, I do not stand in need of either of the luxuries you mention. I have come to you this morning because I want to make some inquiries about houses, and fancied you might be able to help me."

Houses used in the plural had a nice round sound to it, and Mr. Garroway leant back in his chair, and, as he heard it, he placed his finger-tips together with the air of a man who is

prepared to do a good stroke of business, and does not mind if the world knows it.

"May I ask what class of house property you require," he inquired. "I have three excellent country seats upon my books, two houses in the town itself, suitable for a bachelor, or, shall we say, a man with a small family; possibly one of them might meet your case. Of course, if Society is no object, there are several at more remote distances, the rents of which are on a reduced scale."

He spoke as if he thought the Society of Greythorpe were the first in the world.

"No," said George, "I can safely say that I do not care about company. What I *do* want is a retired spot, an old-fashioned country residence, far away from any village or town."

"Pray let me get you my list," said the agent, rising from his chair. "You will then be able to see what class of place I have at my disposal. The list is amended monthly, and all the Properties given in it can be relied upon to tally with the descriptions."

He left the office, and, when he returned to it, brought with him a printed sheet, in which particulars of some fifty or sixty properties, to be sold, or let, were set forth. This he placed before George, and, having done so, he sat down to await results. The houses enumerated were a motley lot. While their demerits were

all hidden, their merits, even if they were of the most meager description, were, as is the fashion in such matters, painted in the most glowing colors. A house in the first column attracted George's attention, but he discarded it as not being suitable. Halfway down the second column, however, he discovered one that seemed likely to have the necessary qualifications.

"Standing in its own grounds, and possesses excellent accommodation for a small family, is very secluded and rural, and five miles from the pretty village of Arlsford. Being somewhat remote, it will be *let* during the owner's absence abroad, at an almost nominal rental."

"This looks like the sort of place," George remarked, indicating the house above mentioned.

"I regret being obliged to say, my dear sir," said the Agent, "that that property was appropriated about a fortnight ago. The gentleman who took it is a German scholar, I should say. From what he told me, I gathered that he wanted a place where he could pursue his studies undisturbed by the outer world. What is more, I fear the place would not suit even you. It is cut off from everywhere, and in winter, when the snow is on the ground, the question of household supplies becomes an eminently serious one."

"Did I understand you to say that the gentle-

man is German," said George, almost betraying his excitement in his eagerness to convince himself as to whether or not he had at last had the good fortune to discover the hiding-place of the fugitives.

"A German, sir, of the name of—let me see —what was the name?" The speaker rubbed his chin reflectively with the forefinger of his right hand for some seconds. Then he went on, "Ah, yes, I have it, his name is Raumer—Mr. Rudolf Raumer. For a foreigner his English was excellent, really excellent!"

George wondered whether this could be the man he wanted. The possibilities seemed in favor of it. In such a situation as he was then in, he would certainly not have taken the place as a Pole, and, in consequence, the name of Raumer would suit him as well as, if not better than, any other. He resolved to institute inquiries at once, and, in order to do so, he determined to visit the place that afternoon.

Turning to the agent, he said:

"I am afraid there is nothing in your list at present that seems at all likely to suit me. If you will permit me to do so, I will call upon you again at some future date. Perhaps, then, you will have something more satisfactory."

"In that case, will you be good enough to favor me with your address," said the agent. "I will then write to you immediately I have

anything worthy of your notice, at the same time enclosing orders to view. May I ask your name?"

For a moment George could not remember the assumed name Burrell had bestowed upon him. Happily, however, he recollected it in time to give it to the agent, who otherwise would probably have become suspicious.

"And now," said George, having furnished Mr. Garroway with his name, "allow me to thank you for your courtesy. I am afraid I have put you to a lot of unnecessary trouble."

"You have done nothing of the kind, my dear sir, nothing of the kind," the other replied. "I am delighted to have been of service to you. I hope I shall have the pleasure of letting, or selling, you a property before very long. Possibly this is your first visit to our neighborhood."

George replied that it was, whereupon the other took from a drawer a small colored pamphlet, and handed it to him with a flourish.

"A litle work of my own," he remarked. "A paper read by myself at our local Athenæum, giving a description of the various places of interest in the district."

So far, George had not been able to discover anything of interest in that particular part of the country; he accepted the present, however, with becoming alacrity, and promised to make

a study of what it contained, after which he wished the agent good-day, and took his departure. As he drove back to Arlsford, he turned the situation over in his mind. It looked very much as if he had had the good fortune to locate the party ; but, even presuming he were correct in his assumption, how was he to act ? For obvious reasons, he could not go boldly to the house and demand from Madame Cardew's gaoler an interview with her ; while to excite even the smallest suspicion that he was aware of their connection with the murder would be as fatal as if he were to proclaim from the house-tops the reason of his presence in the neighborhood.

"Hang it all !" he muttered to himself, as he entered the main street of Arlsford, "I've a good mind to send for Mildmay. I can't be left down here alone, and I have the very best of reason for knowing that he will do his best to prove himself my friend. Yes, I'll send for him at once."

A few moments later he stopped his horse at the grocer's shop, which was also the post and telegraph office. There he dispatched a wire to his friend, asking him, if he had no other engagement, to come down by the afternoon train, promising to meet him at the station at six o'clock. After that he returned to the inn to lunch. That important meal having been

disposed of, he donned his hat, and, when he had inquired his direction, set off across the fields for the house he had seen on the Agent's catalogue, and which was known by the name of Thorsfield. As he was very soon to discover, the description the Agent had given him of the place was a very fair one.

The country, for a couple of miles after leaving Arlsford, consisted mainly of farmland; thence onward it gave way to moorland, alternating with lonely stretches of wind-swept down. It was a picture of desolation on either hand. When George found himself confronted by a high park fence, overhung by many trees, and noticed how remote it stood from everything else, he concluded that he had at last reached his destination. From a semi-intelligent rustic whom he encountered on the path, he learnt that the property was certainly Thorsfield, and he was also informed that the principal entrance was a quarter of a mile or so further down the road. He endeavored to discover from the man who lived in the house, but the other only shook his head.

"Furreners," he answered. "I knaw they be furreners, but that be all I knaw about 'em."

George allowed him to depart, and then wondered what he should do next. He dared not go near the gate, nor could he climb the fence and hide himself in the shrubbery. Yet

he was determined to find out who the occupants of the house were. It was necessary that he should be careful how he behaved, for to be seen prowling round the fences would arouse suspicion, and yet if he did not do so, how was he to discover anything? For upwards of an hour he pitted his wits against the builder of the fence, and in the end was compelled to acknowledge himself beaten. From where he stood he could see the house standing far back among the trees, and once he thought he heard voices. He tried hard to discover whence they came, but without success. At last, disappointed by his non-success, he gave the matter up in despair, and turned his face in the direction of Arlsford once more. The next time he went out he determined to take Mildmay with him, and see what they could accomplish between them.

It was nearly half-past five by the time he reached the village, and he knew that if he desired to meet Mildmay at the station, he had no time to lose. When the horse had been put into the dog-cart, he set off. As it turned out, he reached the station only just in time, for, as he drove up the incline, the train made its appearance round the bend of the line. A few minutes later Mildmay was seated beside him, and they were bowling along the road towards the inn.

"It is very good of you to come down like

this," said George. "You've not seen it, so you can have no idea what a dull hole this is. If you want excitement of another sort, however, I fancy I can give you enough to last you a lifetime. At last I think I have discovered where Madame Cardew is hidden."

"The deuce you have! And where may that be?"

George thereupon furnished him with a brief *resumé* of the case, as it then stood.

"I haven't the least doubt in my own mind," he said in conclusion, "that it is the right house. But what to do, now that I have discovered it, I cannot for the life of me see."

"Oh, we'll find a way of working the oracle, never fear," said Mildmay. "But we must be careful. If Madame Cardew is a prisoner there, would it be wise, do you think, to attempt anything until you are in a position to make her captors secure? To let them know that you are aware of their hiding-place would only have the effect of sending them off hot-foot elsewhere. No; whatever we do, we must go to work with the utmost circumspection. A mistake would ruin everything."

They reached the inn in due course, and gave up the horse to the ostler. As they proceeded down the passage to the coffee-room, a telegram was handed to George. It was signed "J. B.," and ran as follows:—

"Excellent progress. Fancy beginning to see daylight.—J. B."

"God bless you, old fellow, we're a step nearer," said George, slapping Mildmay upon the shoulder — "another step nearer proving her innocence."

CHAPTER XI.

On the day following the receipt of Burrell's encouraging telegram, George and Mildmay set out for Thorsfield on another tour of exploration. It was a lovely summer's morning. Snow-white clouds chased each other across a turquoise sky, throwing wild shadows on the smooth turf of the Downs, and even giving a semblance of vitality to a region that George had hitherto believed to be dead beyond all hope of revival. All things considered, it was a strange walk for two men who had often deemed a stroll from one side to the other on the "sweet shady side of Pall Mall" a sufficiently long peregrination.

"This country air does me a world of good," Mildmay observed, as they reached the top of the hill, and found themselves looking down the valley in which lay the house to which they attached so much importance. "Doubtless, if I inhaled sufficient of it, I should find myself assimilating all the bucolic virtues. "It's not to be wondered at that a man's speech becomes heavy and his intellect dull, when one sees the

sort of landscape upon which his gaze is for ever resting. Cast your eye over this bit of country, and tell me with what emotions it inspires you."

"None whatever," George replied, "save an intense desire to be done with it and never look upon it again. Nothing could be more desolate."

"And pray where is the house?" asked Mildmay. "Just imagine how anxious I am to see it."

"There it is," said George—"straight ahead, about a mile and a half away. A white building with a slate roof, just showing among the trees. The man who built it must have been of a misanthropic turn of mind to have deliberately planted himself down so far away from his fellow-men."

They continued their walk, and presently found themselves confronted by the high park fence, at the spot where George had met and questioned the rustic on the previous day. He explained to Mildmay the position of the main entrance, and showed him the difficulties that would certainly attend any attempt to communicate with the house from that side.

"As it is very evident that the inmates desire to keep themselves to themselves, and there does not, as far as I can see, appear to be another house within a mile, it strikes me that

it will be extremely difficult to discover of w_om the household consists," said Mildmay. "Surely some tradesmen in the neighborhood must serve them? What is the nearest village?"

"Halbridge," George replied, when he had consulted the pocket-map he had brought with him. "About two miles further on."

"A butcher and baker may possibly be found there. Let us push on and find out."

They accordingly continued their walk, and at last arrived, hot and dusty, at the hamlet in question. Their hope, however, of finding shops of any description was doomed to disappointment. The village was not of sufficient importance to require a post-office—even in the matter of a public-house it was deficient—half the cottages were empty, and all were falling to decay.

The only human being to be seen was a woman, an elderly party, who was leaning on her garden-gate, gazing contemptuously at the dusty road before her. The two men approached her, and, having bade her good day, endeavored to draw her into conversation.

"Your village seems a trifle quiet to-day," said Mildmay, with a touch of sarcasm. "Is it ever any livelier?"

"Only when there's a buryin'," the woman replied, without looking up. "An' there 'ant been a buryin' thase two year."

She spoke in an aggrieved tone, as if King Death, in not claiming his victims, had treated her ungenerously. George turned the conversation into another channel.

"That's a strange old house on the right-hand side, two miles or so back," he said, pointing with his stick in the direction they had come. "I fancy it is called Thorsfield. Do you happen to know anything of its history?"

"I've a known the place vor vifty years," she replied, still staring at the road before her. "I knowed it when old Squire Middlethwaite had it, and when his son had it. There wor never no good at Thorsfield. The old squire used to ride round the park at night on his black hunter, and he drunk hisself into his grave. The young squire went hoss-racin', and he did the same; and now *his* son's got it—but he don't live there. Can't abide the place, they do say—which is not to be wondered at, a-seein' what happened there. Time was when their goin's-on wor the talk of the country."

"And yet it seems to be a very fine place," George remarked. "The grounds, from what we could see of them from the outside, would appear to be extensive."

"It's got its own consecrated buryin'-ground down in the corner of the park," the woman observed with relish. "Old squire he lies there, with his wife—Miss Mortimer as was—and

young squire, but not with his wife, a-seein' as how she run away with Sir Robert Bellington from out Cossadge way, and took and died in France, which served her right. They buried her there, I've heard tell."

The constant allusions to the ultimate disposal of man was more than George could put up with.

"You don't happen to know who lives at the place now, I suppose?" he asked. "I understood you to say that the owner does not."

It was certain she had nothing to tell them that could throw any light upon the subject, for she was not even aware that the place was occupied. They thereupon bade her good day, and returned by the way they had come.

"We might have saved ourselves the walk," said George, gloomily, as they trudged along.

Events, however, were destined to turn out somewhat differently to what he had expected.

They had crossed the small bridge which spans the muddy, unwholesome-looking stream that separated Thorsfield from the adjoining moorland, when George determined to climb the steep bank on the opposite side of the stream, and pull himself to the top of the palings in order that he might see what the park contained. It was somewhat of a gymnastic feat, but his athletic training stood him in excellent stead, and, after two unsuccessful attempts,

he managed to accomplish it. Throwing one leg over the rail at the top of the fence, and avoiding the nails with which it was studded as much as possible, he looked about him. It was thick woodland he had before him, with a large amount of undergrowth. He soon saw that if he cared to proceed further his presence was little likely to be detected in this, so he made up his mind to drop over, and to proceed on a journey of exploration.

"I am very much afraid, my dear fellow," he said to Mildmay before he let himself drop, "that it would be impossible for you to manage this fence. I shall have to ask you, therefore, to reserve your patience in the road as well as you can. I'm going to have a look round, but won't be longer than I can help about it."

"Go ahead," said the amiable little man; "don't bother yourself about me. I'll wait on the bridge for you, and amuse myself contemplating the various aspects of rural life. Be careful what you do, however. One mistake at this juncture may ruin all."

"I'll be circumspection itself," George replied. "All I want is to get a knowledge of the lie of the country. I don't suppose I shall be able to do any more—at least, not at present, I must hear from Burrell first."

With that he let himself go, whereupon

Mildmay made his way to the bridge, and seated himself upon one of the guard-rails to await his return.

As George had observed from the top of the fence, the land on the further side consisted of fir trees and thick undergrowth. The latter was in places so dense that he found it a matter of some difficulty to make his way through it. He pushed steadily on, however, steering a course, as near as he could regulate it, for the place where he imagined the house to be. When he had walked something like two hundred yards, the wood suddenly stopped, and he found himself standing before what had once been an ice-house. A few yards from this there was a large pond, or miniature lake, covering an area of upwards of an acre. Large bulrushes grew in the shallow water, and some wildfowl were to be observed in the center. From the lake a path ran to the left, and a short distance from it, an enclosed space was observable, half the size of that covered by the water. Towards this enclosure George made his way. The grass hereabouts was knee-deep and dry and rank for want of cutting. The railings of the enclosure were of iron, but consumed with rust and their struggles with the elements. Large shrubs and a few stunted cypresses lent a variety to the place, but it was not until he had entered it, and found himself

standing before a large stone monolith, moss-covered and weather-worn, that George understood the real character of the place. Near the stone just described was another and yet another, with the high grass enclosing them, and the same air of desolation on every side. Understanding at last where he was, George turned to the stone nearest him and examined it. The inscription, he discovered, when he was able to decipher it, was short and to the point—

CHRISTOPHER MARMADUKE MIDDLETHWAITE,
Born 1812, Died 1854.

That was all! The reading on the second was to the memory of Letitia Middlethwaite, who died in 1863. The third was evidently the tomb of the husband of the lady who had flown with Sir Robert Bellington, and who, as the cottager had said, had been buried in France.

"Poor miserable folk!" said George to himself, as he stood looking at the last stone, with a feeling of real sadness in his heart. "What life's tragedies are written here? Who knows what hidden sorrow drove Christopher Marmaduke to the bottle? Who can tell what agonies, undreamed of by the world, were the portion of poor Letitia Ann? Now they lie here, forgotten by all—the sighing of the wind in the

long grass and trees, and the cries of the wild-fowl on the lake, their only requiem."

He was in the act of rising to his feet, for he had been kneeling in order to examine the monument better, when he became aware that some one was entering the enclosure. As he saw that some one, he gave a start of surprise, and, it might almost be said, of fear, for approaching him, and as yet, for the reason that he was hidden by the tombstone, unconscious of his presence, was the woman for whom he had so long been searching—Cecilia Cardew.

When he stood upright, she saw him, and uttered a cry of consternation.

"You?" she cried, when she found her voice. "How is it you are here? What does this mean?"

For a moment he could not offer her any reply. All things considered, it was such a difficult question to answer. He had never thought that it could be, yet now that it was put to him point-blank, he did not know what to say. Once more she put the question to him, and as he looked at her, he thought that her face had suddenly grown pale.

"You do not tell me why you are here? Why should you follow me?"

"I have come to find you," he faltered at last. "You must know that. I have been searching for you since I received your letter.

Surely you are not angry with me? Have I not tried to prove myself your friend?"

She did not answer, but looked at him with startled eyes. Never since he had first seen her had she appeared so beautiful to him. The sorrow she had experienced had given her a new distinction—subtle, yet quite discernible.

"You are not angry with me for wanting to help you?" he asked, drawing a step nearer to her.

"How could I be?" she answered. "But it is impossible that you can do anything for me. No one can help me now. It is too late."

"I cannot and will not believe that," George continued quickly. "There must be some way in which I can save you, and proclaim your innocence to the world. Will you not trust me?"

"I would trust you only too willingly if it were of any use," she said. "Believe me, my innocence *can never* be proved."

"Oh, think what you are saying," he cried —"think what an interpretation might be placed upon your words! You wrote to me that you were innocent, though the world might believe you to be guilty. Now you say that it cannot be proved. What do you mean?"

"It means that whatever is thought of me, whatever punishment is decreed to me, I must bear it. I shall not defend myself."

He stared at her in astonishment, failing to grasp the situation.

"But—but can you not realize that—that you might be charged with the crime?" he stammered.

"It is possible," she answered. "In that case I must abide by the result, whatever it may be!"

"But this is madness," George protested. "If you are screening some one else, as I feel sure you are, surely that some one else will not let you suffer for his guilt. It would be the most cowardly act the world has ever seen. I cannot believe that such a thing would be possible."

"Ah, because you are brave and loyal yourself, you think every one else must be the same. It is not, unfortunately. But you must go now. It would never do for you to be discovered here."

George, however, did not show any disposition to obey her. He was thinking over what she had told him, and endeavoring to find out some way of persuading her to abandon the position she had taken up, But he could not think of one.

"There is another way of looking at it," he said at last. "You cannot live here in hiding all your life; and every day you stay here adds to your danger. Some one will see you even-

tually, suspicion may be aroused, and then you know what the result will be."

"As you have found me out," she answered, with a faint smile, "I suppose others will do so sooner or later. However, it cannot matter very much if they do. It will only hasten the end. Perhaps, all things considered, that would be as well."

"For God's sake do not talk like that!" cried George, in agony. "It cuts me to the heart to hear you."

"I am sorry," she answered quietly. "Pray forgive me. My trouble makes me selfish. I did not think that it would pain you."

"It could not help doing so. Do you know that I have traced you from Beachcombe? I found the girl Heron, who gave you the paper on which you wrote to me. I found the place where you changed horses at Medbury Clump, and the blacksmith who helped you with the carriage when it broke down on the other side of Arlsford."

"But why did you do it? Why should you have followed me?"

"To help you, if such a thing were possible. It is not too late now. Why will you not let me arrange a plan by which I may get you out of England? There must be many ways in which it could be done. I am a rich man, and, if necessary, every halfpenny I have in the

world shall be devoted to the work. You could travel by night to the coast ; I would have a vessel there to meet you and to bear you off. Then you could go to South America—to Australia—anywhere, in fact, out of England. No one would suspect, and so you would be saved. Only tell me that you will do as I propose, and I will begin to make arrangements to-night."

She shook her head sadly. Her face was very pale.

"Impossible," she answered. "Even if I knew I should be able to get safely away, I could not take advantage of your generosity. But, God knows, I thank you from my heart for your offer."

George groaned in very bitterness of spirit. Time was pressing, and what more could he say to shake her obstinacy ?

"You are shielding some one else ; of that I am certain. If only I knew which of them it is."

"What do you mean ?"

"I wish I knew which of the two men, who brought you here, was the real perpetrator of the crime—whether it was the taller and younger man, or his deformed companion ?"

Her face took an expression of terror as she heard this.

"What do you know of them ?" she cried. "Where did you see them ?"

"I have never seen them," George replied, "but I have heard of them; and I am as certain as I can be of anything that one of them, or both of them, murdered Gravbowski, and that they carried you off lest you should bear witness against them."

She would not inform him whether he was right or wrong, and he realized that it would be useless to press her.

"Now you must go," she said at last. "In remaining here you are running too great a risk."

"There can be no risk for me," he answered; "but if you wish it I will leave you, though with a very sad heart. I had hoped to have been able to persuade you to accept my help, but it seems that I have been unsuccessful."

"I have thanked you," she replied. "You must know that I am grateful to you. I cannot think why you should do so much for one of whom you know nothing save what is bad."

"You must never say that," he cried. "I know nothing of you that is bad, and I shall never know it. Is it possible you cannot guess why I have followed you, and why I so earnestly desire to help you?"

She did not answer him, but turned and glanced down at the moss-covered tombstone beside which she was standing.

"It is because I love you," he went on in the same quiet voice—"because I have loved you from the moment that I stood beside you that day at Victoria. I had never spoken to you, I knew nothing of you—not even your name—yet I loved you as sincerely as if I had known you all my life. It is no idle fancy, but a love that will last a lifetime. If I should never see you again, I should go on loving you until I die."

"Oh, you must not talk like this!" she said. "I am not worthy. Think what I am. Remember the world's opinion of me. If my hiding-place were discovered, I should soon be standing in the dock, accused of murder."

"Never!" he cried desperately. "They shall never insult you so! Rather than that, I would come forward myself and swear that I committed the crime."

"That would not save me," she said, with a wan smile. "They would know that *you* had nothing to do with it."

"But I would declare that I had," he asserted vehemently. "Remember, I was with you on the cliff that night; I returned with you to the house, and reached my hotel at a time which must have been shortly after the murder was committed. Who can disprove my statement if I swear that he and I quarreled about you, and that in a fit of rage I killed him?"

She did not answer, but only stared at him in a fit of consternation.

"If they take you, I shall come forward and say that," he went on. "I pledge you my word to it. Cecilia, may I ask you one question?"

"What is it?" she inquired. "You must see that there are some questions I cannot possibly answer."

"I think you can safely reply to this one," he replied, taking her hand in his and looking earnestly into her face. "When all this misery is at an end and your innocence is proved—as I am certain it will be—would it be possible for you to love me and to be my wife?"

She uttered a little cry of pain.

"How can I answer you?" she replied, drawing her hand away as she spoke. "It is impossible that I can say anything such as you wish. As you pity me do not press me. God knows I am unhappy enough as it is. Go away. Try to forget that you ever saw me. Believe me, you will be happier so."

"I can never be happy without you," he declared. "And for me to forget you would be impossible. Tell me whether, had this dreadful thing not happened, you could have loved me? That is all I ask of you. Give me an answer, if only out of pity."

She saw how much in earnest he was, and held out her hand to him.

"Since you desire it, I will answer you frankly," she said, looking proudly at him. "Yes; had all this misery not fallen to my lot, I feel that I could have loved you."

"Thank God for that," he answered, raising her hand to his lips. "Cecilia, I swear I will make you my wife yet! Now I must go; but before I do so, tell me if it will be possible for you to see me again? I cannot run the risk of drawing attention to your presence here; on the other hand, I cannot leave you without the hope of once more seeing you."

"You must not come here again," she replied; and added quickly, "I do not say it for my sake, but for your own."

Then an idea occurred to him.

"In that little wood yonder," he said, pointing to the other side of the lake, "is an old ice-house. By its side is an oak tree with a large hole in its trunk. I noticed it as I passed on my way here. Now, if I should have occasion to communicate with you, I will drop a letter into that hole, and you perhaps will be able to find means of obtaining possession of it, and will reply in the same way."

"I will try to do so," she answered. "But you must not run any risks." She paused, and then added slowly, "For my sake."

"For your sake I would do and dare any-

thing," he answered. "Now, good-by, and may God bless and protect you."

When he reached the road again, he found Mildmay anxiously awaiting his coming.

"I was beginning to think that something was wrong," he said. "You have been gone more than an hour. What did you discover?"

"I have seen her," George replied.

"Bless my soul, that's good news indeed!" Mildmay replied. "What did she say?"

George gave him a rough outline of their conversation. There was one part, however, that he did not touch upon.

"It is as I always said," Mildmay observed, when George had finished. "She is screening some one else. The question is, What is to be done to get hold of the real culprit, and when we do bring him to book, how will it affect her?"

"We must wait until we have seen Burrell," his friend replied, "before we can answer that question."

CHAPTER XII.

It would be difficult to accurately describe George Kilvert's feelings after his return from his visit to Thorsfield, of which mention was made in the previous chapter. If such a thing were possible, he was more in love than he had been before, and also more frightened for Cecilia's safety than he had been since he had taken up the case. The mere thought that at any moment her hiding-place might be discovered by the police was sufficient to bring out a cold sweat of terror upon his face, and to set him on tenter-hooks for hours. It was, indeed, fortunate for him that Mildmay was with him at the time, for had he been alone in his trouble, I believe his anxiety would have come perilously near depriving him of his reason. As it was, the little man had never appeared in a better light than he did during that most trying time. He seemed to know instinctively what was the best thing to do to soothe his friend, when to be quietly sympathetic and when to be more actively so. One thing is quite certain, his position during those few terrible days was no sinecure.

On the day following his second visit to Thorsfield, George wrote to Burrell giving him an account of his discovery; he also wrote a long letter to Cecilia, and, accompanied by his faithful friend, once more made his way to the lonely house in the valley. As before, Mildmay waited on the bridge while George committed the crime of trespassing. The latter deposited his letter in the hiding-place of which he had spoken to Cecilia, and then, making his way quickly through the wood, searched the banks of the lake for the figure of her he loved. No success rewarded him, however; so, returning by the way he had come, he once more climbed the fence, and dropped from it into the road.

Next evening, as soon as darkness had fallen, he found himself by the lake again. As before, he climbed the fence and hastened to the tree. Scarcely daring to do so, lest he should experience a disappointment, he slipped his hand into the hole. At first he thought there was nothing for him; then his heart gave a great leap, for his fingers had closed upon a square something that could only be an envelope. To withdraw it, and to secrete it in his coat-pocket, was the work of a moment. A few minutes later he had rejoined his friend, and they were striding back to Arlsford as fast as they could go. They had not proceeded far, however, before George called a halt. He could not walk

another step until he had glanced at the letter. He told Mildmay as much, and the little man, whose curiosity, as you may suppose, had also been whetted, agreed that it would be better to see it without delay. They accordingly seated themselves down on the bank beside the road; and then might have been seen the extraordinary spectacle of a millionaire, his elbows on his knees, busily perusing a letter, while his friend, a well-known figure in London Society, struck match after match in order to assist him in the operation. The exact wording of the letter will, I suppose, never be known to us, but certain portions of it have been narrated to me. The main point seemed to be the fact that the writer had been considering her position, and had arrived at the conclusion that it would be better for George's future life that he should have nothing more to do with her. This statement elicited from that gentleman an indignant snort, and brought the match Mildmay was holding perilously near the paper.

"Come along," said George to his companion at last; "we must be getting on." Then he added, with apparent irrelevance, "Confound that Burrell, why doesn't he hurry up with his investigations and come back again? Every minute is of importance."

"Don't be afraid; you'll hear from him before very long," Mildmay replied. "And you

may mark my words, that when you do, it will be good news he has for you. I've every confidence in Burrell."

"You've every confidence in everybody," said George, scornfully.

"Perhaps so," continued the little man; and then he added pathetically, "It may be the reason that I've proved such a failure in life."

"Failure be hanged!" returned his friend, who, it seemed, was determined to disagree with him. "You're the best little chap in the world, and I'd knock the man down who denies it."

"Bosh!" was Mildmay's reply.

When they reached the inn, it wanted only a few minutes to closing-time, and the rustics in the tap-room were beginning to think of returning to the bosoms of their families. Together George and Mildmay made their way to the coffee-room, intending to partake of some light refreshment there, and then be off to bed. Opening the door, they walked into the room, only to receive a great and pleasant surprise. Seated at the table, a steaming steak before him, and a large pewter-pot flanking his plate, was no less a person than that most renowned detective, Jacob Burrell. For a moment George and Mildmay stared at him in surprise; then the former dashed forward, and seized him by the hand.

"I've never been so pleased to see a man in my life," cried George. "When did you arrive?"

"Half an hour ago," Burrell replied. "I caught the 6.50 down from Waterloo. My business in Beachcombe and town being completed, I thought I'd get down here as soon as possible."

"You must tell us all about it," George continued; "but go on with your dinner. You can let us hear what you have done as you eat. By the way, I suppose you received my letter?"

"I did, sir, and thank you for it," said Burrell. "I'm glad you've located the lady, as it will help matters considerably. I think I've got the whole case fixed up now, with the exception of one or two little details which can be settled later. The worst part of it is"—here he paused to take a long pull at the pewter—"that we don't know, and we can't prove, who it was who actually committed the murder. Neither of the men will turn Queen's evidence, you may be sure, and the lady has shown us that she will not round on them."

"We must hope for the best; and surely if we can prove that they were at the house on the night in question, and that they bore a grudge against the dead man, it will be sufficient to convince a Jury of her innocence."

"Unfortunately, sir, Juries are sometimes difficult folk to deal with. I've experienced it very often. They'll see everything but what's right under their noses. Now I'll tell you what I've discovered."

Before he commenced, Mildmay and George ordered refreshments, and then seated themselves at the further end of the table to hear what he had to say.

"In the first place," Burrell began, "I went, as you know, to Beachcombe. The name of the builder of the brougham was Buttridge, and his address was No. 118 Kilvert Street—named after your father, sir. I called upon him, and, after a little preliminary conversation, asked him about a brougham I had seen down in the country with his name on the brass caps of the wheels. I told him about the axle that we could see had been broken before, and also about the new panel. In reply, he informed me that he had sold just such a vehicle, second-hand, to a foreign gentleman, for thirty-four pounds, a short time back. I got the date on which the sale took place, and then asked him if he could tell me where the gentleman lived; but this he did not know. The transaction was a cash affair, and the vehicle was sent that afternoon to the Rose and Crown livery-yard, where he understood the gentleman put up. Leaving the shop, I went on to the stables in question,

where I discovered that a gentleman, name unknown, but a Frenchman, so the manager believed, had called there on the day previous to the murder, and had stated to him that he had purchased a carriage, and wanted to buy a pair of horses for it. When he was suited, he explained that he had a wife who was delicate, and that the carriage was his birthday present to her. In the course of conversation, he remarked that he was remaining in Beachcombe in order to visit the theater that evening, and that, after the performance, he would drive the carriage home himself, in order that it should surprise his wife in the morning. He called for it at a quarter to twelve, and from that moment nothing had been seen of him. From another source I learnt that a carriage had been repeatedly up and down Blake Road—which, as you are doubtless aware, is the street running parallel with Beach Street—between twelve and half-past on the same night. It was a brougham, and was drawn by a pair of horses. Well, sir, when I got hold of that bit of information, I took a look at the map of the county, which told me that Berstead is the principal village between Beachcombe and Hilburne Thither I went, and, after some little trouble, discovered a man who saw the brougham go through the village about half-past two. That was all I wanted, so after that I went back to

London, and took up the thread I had been following before you received that letter from Madame Cardew. It was easier sailing than I had expected, and in the end I was able to locate my men. Their names are Gregorvitch and Rheinveck. The former, that is to say, the elder of the pair who visited Hilburne, has long been suspected of taking a rather too pronounced interest in the politics of Eastern Europe. The younger, Rheinveck, has, up to the present, so far as I am able to gather, a fairly clean sheet. Both men stayed together in London, in a house near Paddington Station, but left on the day before the murder. A squabble with a ticket-collector on the same day at Restow Junction, which nearly resulted in the older man being locked up, about an excess fare, is sufficient to show that they traveled to Beachcombe. As you know, Restow is the place where tickets are collected prior to running into Beachcombe."

"Do you think it will be possible to discover the reason of their animosity to the man who was murdered?"

"That I cannot say just yet. It may come out later."

"And why do you think Madame Cardew is shielding them?"

"That is another question I cannot answer. You'll excuse me, sir, when I say that you

never know what a lady will do," Burrell returned.

They discussed the question in its various bearings for another hour, and then retired to rest.

Next morning Burrell was the first astir. That he had not been idle was evident, for when George and Mildmay came down to breakfast, they found him standing before the empty fireplace with a very serious face.

"What is the matter?" George inquired. "You look as if you have had some bad news."

"Not bad news exactly," the other replied. "But I've had a bit of a surprise, and I don't mind admitting it. It's this way, you see, sir. Just before I left London yesterday, I happened to run across one of the regulars, Sergeant Garth—a man who has always been keen to get me into a corner. He doesn't bear me any too much love, does Garth, and we both know it. Well, we fell into conversation, and by-and-by this case came up. It appears that he has got it in his hands now, but he hasn't made much of it, so far. After we had been talking for a bit, he asked me point-blank whether it was true that I was at work upon it, and, not quite seeing how I could get out of it, I admitted that it was. He then wanted a few pointers, but I couldn't see my way to giv-

ing them to him. When we had chatted for another five minutes we separated, and I went my way and he went his. Supposing he had gone back to Beachcombe—as he had led me to suppose he was going to do—I thought no more of him, and you may imagine my surprise when I saw him just now, shaving himself, at a window in the Eagle Tavern further down the street."

"You mean that he has followed you here in the hope of discovering something?"

"I'm afraid it looks very much like it. However, we must hoodwink him if we can, and lure him off the scent. It would be fatal to allow him to suppose that we are aware of their hiding-place."

That day was destined to be a memorable one in the history of George's life. They saw nothing of Mr. Garth, but they acted as if they were aware that he was keeping a vigilant eye upon them. In the afternoon George went for a walk, leaving Mildmay to watch Garth, and Burrell to go his own way. He was well aware that that astute individual would not be likely to waste any time. Traveling by a roundabout route, he at length reached Thorsfield.

He entered the grounds in the usual way, and, to his dismay, found no letter waiting him in the old oak. This was a greater disap-

pointment to him than I can describe. At any cost he knew that he must communicate with Cecilia, and at once. The presence of Garth, the detective, was a continual menace to her safety, and must be guarded against, happen what might.

Leaving the ice-house, he made his way along the lake towards the old burial-ground. His star, was in the ascendant, for as he approached it from one side, he saw Cecilia entering it from the other. She greeted him with a cry of astonishment and dismay. It was plain that she had not expected to see him.

"Oh, why do you persist in running this risk?" she cried, as if in entreaty. "To-day, of all others, you should have remained away from here."

"And why to-day of all others?" he asked. "What has happened to-day? Have they been ill-treating you?"

"No; but they are quarreling so," she replied, knowing that he would understand to whom she referred.

"I am not in the least afraid of them," George answered. "It is for your safety I fear. Cecilia, my own dear love, there is a grave danger ahead. I have come out to warn you."

"What is it?" she asked, with a quick catch

of her breath. "Is the blow going to fall at last?"

"Unless we are careful, it may," he replied. "A Scotland Yard detective has followed Burrell, the man who has been helping me to find you, down to Arlsford, and if he picks up the clue he may come out here and discover you. Can you imagine what this means to me? Cecilia, my mind is made up—you must fly with me. I'll have my dog-cart in the lane yonder at ten o'clock to-night, and you must manage to steal out. Then off we'll go. It may be dangerous, but it cannot be more so than the position here. Once in Southampton, shall we say, we could easily book our passages for America or the Cape. You could remain in lodgings outside the town while I arrange everything. We could travel as brother and sister, and as soon as we reach our destination, be married. I have told you that I love you, and I will protect you against all the world."

"No, no," she answered, "I could not do it. My mind is made up, and I must face the consequences."

"And break my heart. Do I count for nothing? But there, I have no right to expect that I should. I am not worthy of you."

"Oh, don't say that!" she cried. "You are more than worthy. It is I who am unworthy."

"Then you will come with me?"

"Impossible!" she cried. "You do not know what you are asking of me."

He paused before he put the next question to her. Painful as it would be to both, it was certain that it must be asked.

"Is it possible for you to tell me in what relationship you stand to the man you are shielding?"

Her face was the color of a cere-cloth as she answered—

"*He is my father*—the man whom Gravbowski robbed of my mother!"

Before he spoke again, he walked a few paces from her, and then came back. The position was even worse than he had anticipated. How could he ask her to desert her own father, base though he might be?

While he was turning this question over in his mind, the sound of footsteps reached his ear. A moment later, Mildmay, flushed and well-nigh breathless, burst upon them.

"Quick!" he faltered; "there is not a moment to be lost. The police are on their way here. They may be coming in at the gates now. I only found it out after they had started."

"Come, Cecilia," said George, "We must fly through the wood. We may elude them that way."

She hesitated, however, for a moment. Then, seeing the agony in his eyes, she gave him her hand, and they moved towards the path that led round the lake. They had not advanced many paces, however, before they found themselves confronted by three men, who made their appearance from the wood.

"Cecilia Cardew, in the Queen's name, I arrest you," said their leader, advancing towards her, "on a charge of murdering one, Auton Gravbowski. I caution you that anything you may say will be used as evidence against you."

For a moment George felt a wild desire to make a fight for it, in the hope that he and Cecilia might be able to escape. Common sense, however, prevailed, and he abandoned the idea.

"Where are you going to take the lady?" he asked of the leader of the men.

"For the present as far as the house," the other replied. "After that into Greythorpe."

With that they turned and walked back together through the wood to the house. On that melancholy journey no one spoke. The hand of Fate lay heavily upon at least three of them. Even Mildmay's face was preternaturally serious.

When they reached the house, they found the front door standing open. They thereupon

entered the hall, which was large and stone-paved. Four doors opened out of it, and at one of these a policeman stood. As the little party entered, a tall, black-bearded man emerged, accompanied by a younger man, with dark, flashing eyes and a sallow complexion. The first was doubtless a detective officer, the second George recognized immediately, from the description Polly Heron had given him, as being the younger of the two men who had stayed at the hall at Hilburne.

"So they've got you too, my lady, have they?" he said, with a sneer, when he saw Cecilia. "There will be nice doings when *he* hears of it They haven't caught him yet, I suppose?"

Cecilia did not answer. Her face was deathly pale, and George stood beside her, expecting every moment that she would fall.

"Where is Garth?" asked the detective who had entered the hall with Rheinveck.

"Gone after the other man," one of the policemen replied. "He managed to get wind somehow of our approach, and bolted into the woods. But they'll nab him, never fear."

The officer's prophecy proved correct, for a few moments later the sound of footsteps on the gravel outside proclaimed the arrival of another party, and presently Detective Sergeant Garth, with Private Detective Burrell, entered, escort-

ing a little man, whose enormously broad shoulders and clean-shaven face proclaimed him Constantine Gregorvitch, the man whom Cecilia had declared to be her father.

So far as outward appearances went he was not in the least concerned at his arrest, but looked round upon the company as calmly as if they had met there for the performance of some pleasant social function.

"What is the next move to be?" he inquired of Garth, who was talking in an undertone to one of his men a short distance from him.

"We shall take you into Greythorpe for to-night," the detective answered, "and to-morrow you will probably go to Beachcombe."

Gregorvitch turned to Rheinveck, and nodded pleasantly to him.

"Do you remember what I told you last night?" he asked. "Did I not say that it would be your fault if we got caught? Didn't I warn you of the consequences of your foolhardiness? I did. Well, we *are* caught. And there's your reward!"

Before any one could stop him, or realize what he was about to do, he had whipped a revolver from his pocket, and discharged it, point-blank, at the other man, who tottered a a step backwards, and then fell to the ground. Then, as Garth turned to seize him, he placed the barrel of the pistol in his mouth, and pulled

the trigger. A loud report followed, and he dropped upon the floor dead. With a cry, Cecilia fell in a dead faint into George's arms. When the two men were examined, it was discovered that Gregorvitch was dead, but that Rheinveck, though badly wounded, was alive.

Picking up his lovely burden, George carried her into one of the adjoining rooms, and laid her on a couch there. Water was procured and her temples bathed, but it was not until half an hour had passed that she opened her eyes. Then it became evident that, for the time being, the shock she had received had been too much for her overwrought brain. She gazed about her in a vacant fashion, and did not appear to recognize any one. George was nearly beside himself. With the help of an old woman, who was discovered by Burrell, amid all the confusion, calmly pursuing her usual avocations in the kitchen, Cecilia was conveyed to her own room, and a messenger was dispatched post-haste to Greythorpe for a doctor and nurses. Meanwhile all that was possible was being done for Rheinveck. He was placed on a couch in the drawing-room, and strenuous efforts were made by Burrell, who had some small skill in such matters, to arrest the flow of blood that was fast draining the life out of him.

Something like an hour and a half elapsed before the doctor and nurses arrived, and

during that time George's anxiety was pitiful to witness.

"I'm sorry for you, sir," said Garth—"very sorry indeed—but I don't see what else we can do. It will be impossible to move them, so they must perforce remain here. What are you going to do yourself, sir?"

"I shall stay here also," George replied. "Let nothing be spared. All that science can do must be done for him, and also for her. If he dies, all chance of proving her innocence will be gone for ever. When he recovers consciousness, do you think it would be possible to induce him to confess?"

"We'll see what can be done, sir," the man replied. "From what the doctor says, there does not seem to be very much chance of saving his life. I had no idea that Gregorvitch had a weapon in his pocket. I am afraid I shall get into trouble at Head-Quarters for not having searched him."

"Madame Cardew informed me that the two men had been quarreling all day," said George.

"So I have been told, sir."

At a late hour that evening there was no change in Cecilia's condition. Rheinveck, however, was steadily growing weaker. Shortly before midnight, Garth sought George again.

"There can be no doubt, sir," he said, "that the man is sinking fast. He is conscious, and

calls for a priest. He tells me that he wants to make a confession, so I am sending for a certain Father Saunders at Arlsford, and also a messenger to a magistrate who lives about two miles from here—a Sir Walter Bellington."

"Good Heavens, how strange?" said George.

"What is strange, sir?"

"That you should have sent for Sir Walter Bellington. It will be the first time in his life he's entered this house, I'll be bound. You don't know, I suppose, that his father ran away with the mother of the present owner?"

"That's very curious, but I don't think it will prevent his coming."

"Let us hope not."

It was nearly half-past one before the magistrate's dog-cart pulled up at the front door. George and Garth went out to receive him, and found him a tall, handsome man, with a distinctly military appearance. He had already been informed as to the reason he was wanted, and had come prepared. He entered the house accompanied by the two men, and George noticed that he looked about him with some curiosity. Owing to his serious condition, the dying man had not been moved from the couch on which he had first been placed. The doctor was kneeling beside him.

"Is he well enough to talk, do you think?" the magistrate inquired.

"It won't make any difference," said the doctor. "It's only a question of a quarter of an hour or so, I fancy, before the end will come."

"My man," said Sir Walter, taking up the pen and paper that had been provided for him, "I understand that you desire, of your own free will, to make a confession regarding the murder of Ladislaus Radizwill, otherwise known as Gravbowski. Is this so?"

"It is," said Rheinveck, feebly.

The oath was thereupon administered, and when this was done, the dying man was asked what he had to say.

"Only that the woman is innocent," he replied. "I killed Gravbowski, and I'd do it again. He was a traitor to his friends and to his country. He betrayed my father, who was sent to Siberia, and many others. He ran away with the wife of Paulus Stenovitch and deserted her. Gregorvitch and I were sent to England to kill him, but we searched for a long time before we could find him. Then we made our plans. We took this house, knowing we should have to hide somewhere until the affair had blown over a little. We tried to catch him at Tunbridge Wells, but missed him. Then we followed him to Beachcombe."

The man paused for a moment exhausted. When the doctor had given him a stimulant, he was able to continue.

"Gregorvitch remained with the carriage we had bought in the next street, while I waited for Gravbowski to come back. I was surprised to see him by himself, as we had expected the girl to be with him. When he reached the door, I accosted him, and asked to be allowed to speak to him for a few moments. At first he would not agree to my request, but when I told him I had come to warn him of a plot against him, he told me to come into the house with him. We entered his sitting-room, and he inquired what I had to say. In reply I threw a photograph upon the table, and asked him if he recognized it? He bent down to look, and then I caught him by the throat and stabbed him. He fell without a sound. I was just about to leave him when the door opened, and the woman, known as Madame Cardew, entered the room. She was going to cry out, but I prevented her, and asked her if she recognized me. I told her that I was her brother—the brother she had not seen since she was a little child—and that I had come to kill the man in order to avenge his treatment of our mother. To prove it, I showed her a portrait of a woman hanging round my neck. This convinced her, and then I led her from the house. We entered the carriage that was waiting for us, and drove away. In time we reached this place, and

thought we were safe. This is all I have to say. It is the truth; I swear it."

The whole confession having been read to him, he was lifted up in order that he might sign it. This he did, and when the Magistrate and witnesses had attached their signatures to it, the document was complete.

"One question more," said George, approaching the prostrate man. "You told her you were her brother. Was that true?"

"No; her brother is dead. He died in Prague last year of fever. She did not know it, for they never communicated with each other. If I had only known——"

He closed his eyes, and murmured something in German that was unintelligible. Half an hour later he was dead.

"Thank God he lived long enough to save her honor," said George.

* * * * *

For more than a month Cecilia hovered between life and death. A terrible attack of brain fever was the result of the shock she had received, But all that science and wealth could do was done, and at last she was declared to be out of danger.

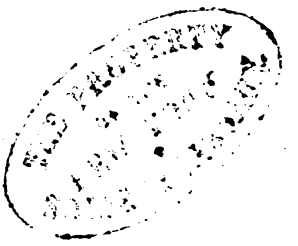
I was present at the wedding three months later, and I venture to say that a handsomer couple never stood before a clergyman. Mild-

may acted as best man, and acquitted himself admirably. Sitting near me in the church was a stout individual, with a jolly red face and an enormous pair of hands, to whom I was afterwards introduced. This was Mr. Jacob Burrell.

"I take a great interest in this wedding," said he. "Somehow I feel as if I'd played a big part in bringing it about."

All things considered he certainly had

THE END.



Joan, the Curate

By FLORENCE WARDEN

308 pages, size 7½ x 5, Cloth 3 stampings, $1.00

The time of the story is 1748, its scene being along the seacoast of Sussex, England. The doings here of the "free traders," as they called themselves, or smugglers, as the government named them, had become so audacious that a revenue cutter with a smart young lieutenant in command, and a brigade of cavalry, were sent down to work together against the offenders. Everybody in the village seems engaged in evading the revenue laws, and the events are very exciting. Joan is the parson's daughter, and so capable and useful in the parish that she is called "the curate." She and the smart young lieutenant are the characters in a romance.
—*Book Notes.*

"Joan, the Curate" (Joan, a creamy-skinned, black-eyed maiden, gets her surname on account of the part she plays in helping her father, Parson Langley, with his duties), is a village tale of the smuggling days on the wild marsh coast of Kent and the equally lonely cliffs of Sussex. The village is a hot-bed of these daring "free traders," even the parson and his daughter are secretly in sympathy with them, and young Lieutenant Tregenna, who is in command of the revenue cutter sent to overawe the natives, has anything but a comfortable task to perform. His difficulties only increase when he falls in love with Joan and discovers her leanings towards the illegalities of the village, and when, at the same time, the audacious leader of the smugglers, Ann Price, who carries on her trade disguised as a man, falls in love with him herself, the complications are almost bewildering. The story moves through countless adventures, sanguinary fights, and lovers' quarrels to the conventionally happy ending and the partial return of the fishermen to honest ways.—*Book News.*

Miss Florence Warden in "Joan, the Curate" tells an orthodox tale of smugglers in the last century with plenty of exciting adventures and no deviations from the accepted traditions of a familiar pattern in fiction.—*N. Y. Sun.*

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The Real Lady Hilda

By B. M. CROKER

266 pages, size 7½ x 5, Cloth, 3 stampings, $1.00

"The Real Lady Hilda," by B. M. Croker, is a very pleasing novel, depending for its interest not upon sensational incident, but upon a clever portrayal of disagreeable traits of character in high society. The story is told by a young lady who finds herself with her stepmother in obscure lodgings in an obscure country town. The head of the family had been physician to a Rajah in India, had lived in princely style and had entertained in princely fashion. He had died and left to his widow and child nothing but a small pension, and they soon found themselves in straightened circumstances. Besides the character drawing, the entertaining feature of the story lies in the shabby treatment which the two impecunious women receive from the people whom they have so royally entertained in India, and the inability of the widow, with her Indian experience, to understand it. Entertaining too is the fawning toadyism of the middle-class women, who disdainfully tip their noses and wag their tongues when they find that the poor women are neglected by the great lady in the neighborhood.

—*The Bookseller, Newsdealer and Stationer.*

Mrs. Croker belongs to the group of English country life novelists. She is not one of its chief members, but she succeeds often in being amusing in a quiet, simple way. Her gentlefolk lack the stamp of caste, but the plots in which they are placed are generally rather ingenious. Of course, in a field so assiduously worked, one cannot look for originality. The present book is just what the author modestly calls it—a "sketch," with the usual poor girl of good family and the equally familiar happy ending.—*Mail and Express.*

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9-11 East 16th Street, New York

The Good Mrs. Hypocrite

By "RITA"

284 pages, size 7½ x 5, Cloth, 3 stampings, $1.00

"Good Mrs. Hypocrite," a study in self-righteousness, is a most enjoyable novel by "Rita." It has little of plot, and less of adventure, but is the study of a single character and a narration of her career. But she is sufficiently unique to absorb the attention, and her purely domestic experiences are quite amusing. She is the youngest daughter of a Scotch family, angular as to form and sour as to feature. She had an aggressive manner, was selfish, and from girlhood set herself against all tenderness of sentiment. Losing her parents, she tried her hand as a governess, went to her brother in Australia, returned to England and joined a sisterhood in strange garb, and her quarrelsome disposition and her habit of quoting scripture to set herself right made her presence everywhere objectionable. For this old maid was very religious and strict as to all outward forms. Finally she went to live with an invalid brother. She discharged the servant, chiefly because she was plump and fair of feature, and she replaced her with a maid as angular as herself, straight from Edinbro'. The maid was also religious and quoted scripture, and the fun of the story lies in the manner in which the woman who had had her way so long was beaten by own weapons.—*Bookseller, Newsdealer and Stationer.*

The Scotch character is held up in this story at its worst. All its harshness, love of money, unconscious hypocrisy, which believes in lip-service while serving but its own self, are concentrated in the figure of the old spinster who takes charge of her invalid brother's household. She finds a match, however, in the Scotch servant she hires, hard like herself, but with the undemonstrative kindness that seems to be a virtue of the race. The book lacks the charm that lies at the root of the popularity of the books of the "Kailyard" school. In its disagreeable way, however, it is consistent, though the melodramatic climax is not the ending one has a right to expect.—*The Mail and Express.*

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F. M. BUCKLES & COMPANY
9-11 East 16th Street, New York

Captain Jackman

By W. CLARK RUSSELL

240 pages, size 7½ x 5, Cloth, 3 stampings, $1.00

"Captain Jackman; or, A Tale of Two Tunnels," is a story by W. Clark Russell, not so elaborate in plot as some of his stories, or so full of life on the sea, but some of the characters are sailors, and its incidents are of the ocean, if not on it. Its hero is dismissed from the command of a ship by her owners, because of his loss of the proceeds of a voyage, which they evidently think he had appropriated to himself. The heroine discovers him in, and rescues him from a deserted smuggler's cave, where he had by some mischance imprisoned himself. He handsome, she romantic as well, they fall in love with each other. Her father, a retired commander of the Royal navy, storms and swears to no purpose, for she elopes with the handsome captain, who starts on an expedition to capture a Portugese ship laden with gold —a mad scheme, conceived as it appears by a madman, which accounts for his curious and unconventional ways.

—Bookseller, Newsdealer and Stationer.

It is readable, interesting, and admirable in its technical skill. Mr. Russell, without apparent effort, creates an atmosphere of realism. His personages are often drawn with a few indicative strokes, but this can never be said of his central figures. In the present little story the fascinating personality of Captain Jackman stands out very clearly. He is a curious study, and the abnormal state of his mind is made to come slowly into the recognition of the reader just as it does into that of old Commander Conway, R. N. This is really a masterly bit of story-craft, for it is to this that the maintenance of the interest of the story is due. The reader does not realize at first that he is following the fortunes of a madman, but regards Jackman as a brilliant adventurer. The denoument is excellently brought about, although it gives the tale its sketchy character.—*N. Y. Times.*

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